The New Criterion

May 2003

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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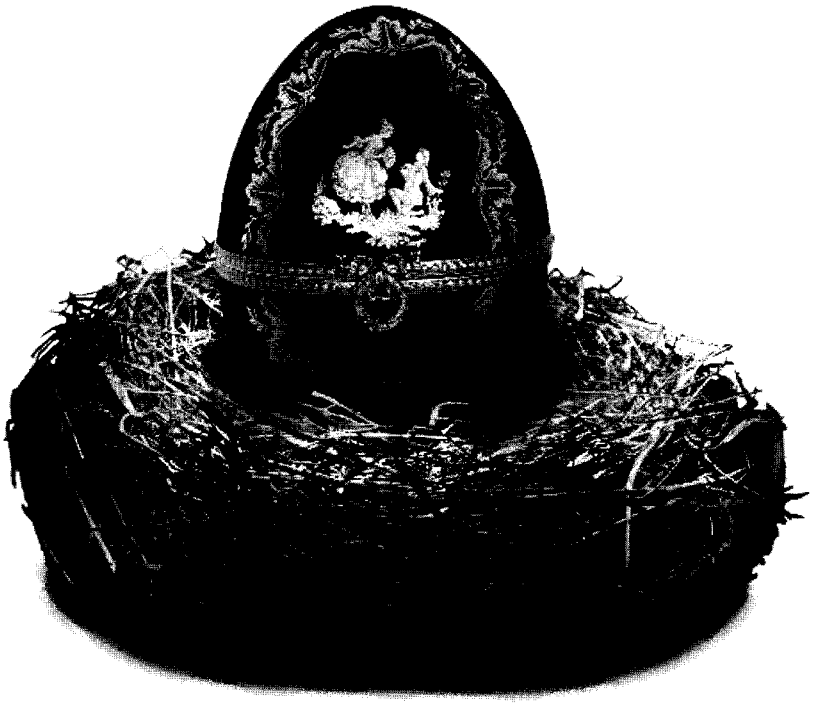

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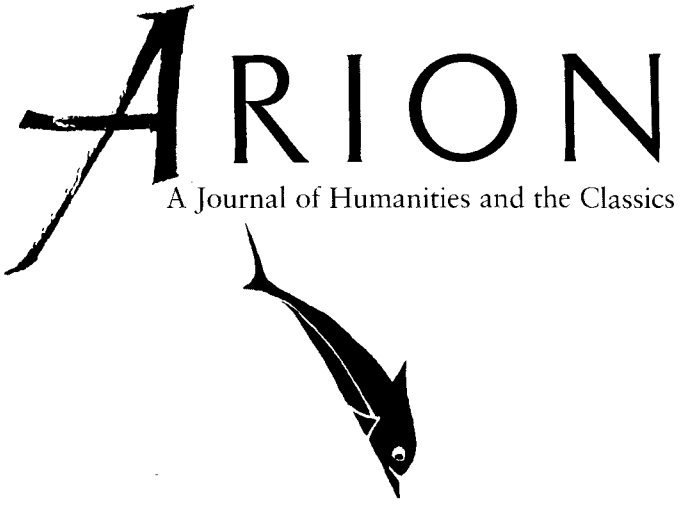

The grand sequence of the classical tradition, which extends in various strands through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the scientific Enlightenment and modern era, is actually a master paradigm for how to structure an authentically multicultural curriculum on a global scale. All students abroad as well as in the US need to learn the general contours of the world's major artistic and cultural traditions. These long channels of lineage can best be understood as streams—mighty rivers that are fed by tributaries and that are a confluence of mixed and varied material . . .

Camille Paglia, "The Mighty River of Classics"
Arion Volume IX, Number 2.

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Notes & Comments: May 2003

The end of the line?

In Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Purloined Letter," the trick is that the incriminating letter is not hidden but has been sitting in plain sight all along. The moral is that what is most obvious is sometimes easiest to overlook, as the vain and frantic efforts of the Prefect of the Parisian Police to recover the missing document attest. Anyone who has had the misfortune to peek into the library of deconstructivist literature knows that Poe's story is a favorite object of lucubration. The two Jacques, Derrida and Lacan, both devoted many impenetrable pages to the story, as have many of their epigoni.

We thought of Poe's classic story recently when alerted by a friend to *The New York Times*'s account of a conference about literary theory sponsored by *Critical Inquiry*, a hermetic quarterly that has long been home to deconstructionists, post-structuralists, Lacanian-psychoanalysts, and other acolytes of academic tergiversation. It was, apparently, a somber convocation. The title of the *Times*'s story—"The Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn't Matter"—captured the tone. More than five hundred academic aspirants crowded into a lecture hall at the University of Chicago on April 11 to witness an exchange among a quire of such faded luminaries as Stanley Fish, Fredric Jameson, and Homi Bhabha. The war in Iraq apparently received much anguished attention. But theory—the ostensible subject of the conference—garnered only afterthoughts. Professor Bhabha, a "post-colonialist" and one of the most preposterous figures on the current academic scene, wearily objected that theory still mattered, that there are "poems that actually draw together people in acts of resistance." But according to the *Times*, the dominant note was sounded by Sander L. Gilman, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago:

> I think one must be careful in assuming that intellectuals have some kind of insight. In fact, if the track record of intellectuals is any indication, not only have intellectuals been wrong almost all of the time, but they have been wrong in corrosive and destructive ways.

What's next? The discovery that the earth is round? That water is wet? We won't say "We told you so," but, well, we did. The friend who told us about the *Times*'s story said "It is practically a concession speech to *The New Criterion*." We won't go that far. Doubtless Professor Gilman and his colleagues would be horrified at the thought. But there is something to the idea: for more than twenty years now, *The New Criterion* has been dilating on the nullity of literary so-called theory and the destructive com-

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mitment to adolescent leftism that it involves. Naturally, we have been routinely abominated for our pains. It is pleasant, therefore, to find, if not a concession, then at least a tacit acknowledgment that the humanities have taken a wrong turn. So many trendy academics have weighed in on "The Purloined Letter" that it is a pity that they didn't take the story's epigraph more to heart: *Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*: "Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than excessive cleverness."

Annals of the BBC

Later in this issue, James Bowman reports on the mainstream media's coverage of the war with Iraq. It is an inglorious tale: a compendium of anti-American broadsides, half snide, half furious, almost comically wrongheaded and inaccurate. A few days into the conflict, major media institutions from *The New York Times* to CNN and the BBC could barely contain their glee. What, not yet in Baghdad? What happened to the "cakewalk" that Dick Cheney predicted? OK, OK, it turns out the vice-president did *not* predict a cakewalk, he was merely reported to have done so, and what is reported can be repeated. Still, disaster clearly loomed. The war, we were told, was proceeding much more slowly than the administration expected; casualties were mounting; civilians were being bombed; the coalition didn't have enough troops; supply lines were over-stretched; we had forgotten about sandstorms and the fierce desert heat; natives greeted coalition forces with bullets, not flowers; Baghdad promised to be a latter-day Stalingrad, house-to-house fighting, bloodbath, quagmire, US arrogance, cowboy, Europe told us so, Bush, Bush, Bush . . .

Well, that was day four or five. Three weeks after the war began, one of the most brilliant military campaigns in history ended with Iraq liberated from Saddam and his henchmen, its infrastructure intact, and astonishingly few civilian or coalition casualties. It was an amazing, an extraordinary performance—unprecedented in its speed and precision—but you didn't catch the mainstream media frankly acknowledging that fact. On the contrary, no sooner did the coalition forces win the war than the media began wringing its collective hands about whether we were on the brink of "losing the peace," "widespread looting," etc., etc.

Of course, there were a few bright spots in the media's reporting, particularly from some "embedded" reporters and some so-called internet "bloggers." As Mr. Bowman suggests, however, the dominant note was ignominious. The low point? Well, competition is stiff for the title to that achievement. CNN is at least a runner-up, not only because of its consistently anti-American bias, but also for its policy of deliberately hushing up the grim realities of Hussein's regime in exchange for "access"—a fact that, as Mr. Bowman notes, its chief news executive managed to admit and evade in the space of a single op-ed contribution. Still, after all the contestants have been scrutinized, we believe that the BBC deserves to come out on top (or do we mean at the bottom?) in this diabolical contest for awfulness. Mr. Bowman recounts several outrages perpetrated by the once illustrious news organization that, when the war got underway, was widely referred to as the "Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation."

We'd like to share with readers two additional items that came to light after Mr. Bowman's piece went to press. They offer graphic corroboration of the BBC's reflexive ideological posturing. The swift fall of Baghdad was a grievous blow to those parts of the Western media that backed the quagmire-thesis of buffoons like *The New York Times*'s R. W. Apple. How to deal with such an unscripted event? Easy: turn success into

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failure. The coalition had come to liberate Iraq, but according to Andrew Gilligan, the BBC's defense correspondent, residents of Baghdad experienced their "first days of freedom in more fear than they have ever known before." "More fear"? Really? Was a bit of looting worse that Saddam's secret police? As a spokesman for the British government tartly advised, "Try telling that to people put in shredders or getting their tongues cut out."

It would be a mistake to think that the BBC's reporting on Iraq was an anomaly. The ideological bias of the institution is evident in virtually all its reporting. Consider the recent capture of Abu Abbas, the Palestinian terrorist who masterminded the hijacking of the US cruise ship *Achille Lauro* in 1985. It was simply business as usual for the BBC to describe Abu Abbas blandly a "fugitive"—after all, "terrorist" is such a judgmental word. But it takes a special sort of blindness to proceed, as the BBC's initial report did (thanks to www.andrewsullivan.com for bringing this to our attention), that "During the hijack, an elderly American passenger died." Died? What happened to the poor fellow? Did he suffer a shuffleboard-induced heart attack, aspirate an olive, expire from sunstroke?

The "elderly American passenger" who died when Abu Abbas hijacked the *Achille Lauro* was Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American Jew who was on holiday with his wife. He died because Abu Abbas's Palestinian thugs shot him twice in the head and then pushed him overboard. The BBC later emended "died" to "was killed," which is still considerably less candid than "murdered," the blunt but accurate term employed by Fox News.

We heard a lot about "collateral damage" when the war against Iraq started. The extraordinary precision of America's weapons and the unprecedented care with which coalition forces targeted the enemy reduced collateral damage to an historic low. But we may still hope that this conflict has brought in its wake some collateral benefits—the delegitimation of the United Nations, for example, whose preposterous sermonizing in the months leading up to the war with Iraq put paid once and for all to its pretensions to be a serious player on the stage of international relations. We may also hope that media outlets like the BBC have finally provoked sufficient public outrage that their status as state-funded propaganda machines for the enemy will finally be called into question. The fact that sailors from a Royal Navy aircraft carrier turned off their direct feed from the BBC in protest of its pro-Iraqi coverage is a good sign, as is the disgust and anger of some members of the British government. We are sometimes accused of being pessimists, but we admit that the privatization of the BBC would be a brilliant silver lining to the very dark cloud represented by its distorted, politically tendentious reporting. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Farewell to PR

In this space in October 2002, we noted the death at ninety-four of our friend William Phillips, the founding co-editor (with Philip Rahv) of *Partisan Review*. In its great period, in the 1940s and 1950s, *Partisan Review* was a catalyzing force in American cultural and political debate. Throughout its history, largely because of Mr. Phillips's editorial guidance, it was a home to candid and independent cultural criticism. It was recently announced that the current issue of *PR*—which features recollections of William Phillips by many of his former colleagues, friends, and admirers—will also be the magazine's last issue. The editors of *The New Criterion* wish to salute William Phillips's memory and the enlivening example of the magazine over which he presided with beneficent intelligence for more than five decades.

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The hypocrisy of Noam Chomsky

by Keith Windschuttle

There's a famous definition in the Gospels of the hypocrite, and the hypocrite is the person who refuses to apply to himself the standards he applies to others. By that standard, the entire commentary and discussion of the so-called War on Terror is pure hypocrisy, virtually without exception. Can anybody understand that? No, they can't understand it.
—Noam Chomsky, *Power and Terror*, 2003

Noam Chomsky was the most conspicuous American intellectual to rationalize the Al Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The death toll, he argued, was minor compared to the list of Third World victims of the "far more extreme terrorism" of United States foreign policy. Despite its calculated affront to mainstream opinion, this sentiment went down very well with Chomsky's own constituency. He has never been more popular among the academic and intellectual left than he is today.

Two books of interviews with him published since September 11, 2001 both went straight onto the bestseller lists.[1] One of them has since been turned into a film entitled *Power and Terror*, now doing brisk business in the art-house movie market. In March 2002 the film's director, John Junkerman, accompanied his subject to the University of California, Berkeley, where in a five-day visit Chomsky gave five political talks to a total audience of no fewer than five thousand people.

Meanwhile, the liberal news media around the world has sought him out for countless interviews as the most prominent intellectual opposed to the American response to the terrorist attacks. Newspaper articles routinely open by reminding readers of his awesome intellectual status. A profile headlined "Conscience of a Nation" in the English daily *The Guardian* declared: "Chomsky ranks with Marx, Shakespeare, and the Bible as one of the ten most quoted sources in the humanities—and is the only writer among them still alive." *The New York Times* has called him "arguably the most important intellectual alive."

Chomsky has used his status, originally gained in the field of linguistics, to turn himself into the leading voice of the American left. He is not merely a spokesman. His own stance has done much to structure left-wing politics over the past forty years. Today, when actors, rock stars, and protesting students mouth anti-American slogans for the cameras, they are very often expressing sentiments they have gleaned from Chomsky's voluminous output.

Hence, to examine Chomsky's views is to analyze the core mindset of contemporary radicalism, especially the variety that now

1 *September 11*, by Noam Chomsky; Seven Stories Press, 96 pages, $8.95. *Power and Terror: Post 9/11 Talks and Interviews*, by Noam Chomsky, edited by John Junkerman and Takei Masakazu; Seven Stories Press, 144 pages, $11.95.

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holds so much sway in the academic and arts communities.

Chomsky has been a celebrity radical since the mid-1960s when he made his name as an anti-Vietnam War activist. Although he lost some of his appeal in the late-1970s and 1980s by his defense of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, he has used September 11 to restore his reputation, indeed to surpass his former influence and stature. At seventy-four years of age, he is today the doyen of the American and much of the world's intellectual left.

He is, however, an unconventional academic radical. Over the past thirty years, the left in the humanities has been smitten by high theory, especially neo-Marxist, feminist, and postmodernist philosophy out of Germany and France. Much of this material was arcane enough in its own language but in translation it elevated obscurantism to a badge of prestige. It inundated the humanities with relativism both in epistemology and moral philosophy.

In contrast, Chomsky has produced no substantial body of political theory of his own. Nor is he a relativist. He advocates the pursuit of truth and knowledge about human affairs and promotes a simple, universal set of moral principles. Moreover, his political writings are very clear, pitched to a general rather than specialist audience. He supports his claims not by appeals to some esoteric conceptual apparatus but by presenting plain, apparently factual evidence. The explanation for his current appeal, therefore, needs to be sought not in recent intellectual fashions but in something with a longer history.

Chomsky is the most prominent intellectual remnant of the New Left of the 1960s. In many ways he epitomized the New Left and its hatred of "Amerika," a country he believed, through its policies both at home and abroad, had descended into fascism. In his most famous book of the Sixties, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, Chomsky said what America needed was "a kind of denazification."

Of all the major powers in the Sixties, according to Chomsky, America was the most reprehensible. Its principles of liberal democracy were a sham. Its democracy was a "four-year dictatorship" and its economic commitment to free markets was merely a disguise for corporate power. Its foreign policy was positively evil. "By any objective standard," he wrote at the time, "the United States has become the most aggressive power in the world, the greatest threat to peace, to national self-determination, and to international cooperation."

As an anti-war activist, Chomsky participated in some of the most publicized demonstrations, including the attempt, famously celebrated in Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, to form a human chain around the Pentagon. Chomsky described the event as "tens of thousands of young people surrounding what they believe to be—I must add that I agree—the most hideous institution on this earth."

This kind of anti-Americanism was common on the left at the time but there were two things that made Chomsky stand out from the crowd. He was a scholar with a remarkable reputation and he was in tune with the anti-authoritarianism of the student-based New Left.

At the time, the traditional left was still dominated by an older generation of Marxists, who were either supporters of the Communist Party or else Trotskyists opposed to Joseph Stalin and his heirs but who still endorsed Lenin and Bolshevism. Either way, the emerging generation of radical students saw both groups as compromised by their support for the Russian Revolution and the repressive regimes it had bequeathed to eastern Europe.

Chomsky was not himself a member of the student generation—in 1968 he was a forty-year-old tenured professor—but his lack of party membership or any other formal political commitment absolved him of any connection to the Old Left. Instead, his adherence to anarchism, or what he called "libertarian socialism," did much to shape the outlook of the New Left.

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American Power and the New Mandarins approvingly quotes the nineteenth-century anarchist Mikhail Bakunin predicting that the version of socialism supported by Karl Marx would end up transferring state power not to the workers but to the elitist cadres of the Communist Party itself.

Despite his anti-Bolshevism, Chomsky remained a supporter of socialist revolution. He urged that "a true social revolution" would transform the masses so they could take power into their own hands and run institutions themselves. His favorite real-life political model was the short-lived anarchist enclave formed in Barcelona in 1936–1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

The Sixties demand for "student power" was a consequence of this brand of political thought. It allowed the New Left to persuade itself that it had invented a more pristine form of radicalism, untainted by the totalitarianism of the communist world.

For all his in-principle disdain of communism, however, when it came to the real world of international politics Chomsky turned out to endorse a fairly orthodox band of socialist revolutionaries. They included the architects of communism in Cuba, Fidel Castro and Che Guevera, as well as Mao Tse-tung and the founders of the Chinese communist state. Chomsky told a forum in New York in December, 1967 that in China "one finds many things that are really quite admirable." He believed the Chinese had gone some way to empowering the masses along lines endorsed by his own libertarian socialist principles:

> China is an important example of a new society in which very interesting and positive things happened at the local level, in which a good deal of the collectivization and communization was really based on mass participation and took place after a level of understanding had been reached in the peasantry that led to this next step.

When he provided this endorsement of what he called Mao Tse-tung's "relatively livable" and "just society," Chomsky was probably unaware he was speaking only five years after the end of the great Chinese famine of 1958–1962, the worst in human history. He did not know, because the full story did not come out for another two decades, that the very collectivization he endorsed was the principal cause of this famine, one of the greatest human catastrophes ever, with a total death toll of thirty million people.

Nonetheless, if he was as genuinely aloof from totalitarianism as his political principles proclaimed, the track record of communism in the USSR—which was by then widely known to have faked its statistics of agricultural and industrial output in the 1930s when its own population was also suffering crop failures and famine—should have left this anarchist a little more skeptical about the claims of the Russians' counterparts in China.

In fact, Chomsky was well aware of the degree of violence that communist regimes had routinely directed at the people of their own countries. At the 1967 New York forum he acknowledged both "the mass slaughter of landlords in China" and "the slaughter of landlords in North Vietnam" that had taken place once the communists came to power. His main objective, however, was to provide a rationalization for this violence, especially that of the National Liberation Front then trying to take control of South Vietnam. Chomsky revealed he was no pacifist.

> I don't accept the view that we can just condemn the NLF terror, period, because it was so horrible. I think we really have to ask questions of comparative costs, ugly as that may sound. And if we are going to take a moral position on this—and I think we should—we have to ask both what the consequences were of using terror and not using terror. If it were true that the consequences of not using terror would be that the peasantry in Vietnam would continue to live in the state of the peasantry of the Philippines, then I think the use of terror would be justified.

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It was not only Chomsky who was sucked into supporting the maelstrom of violence that characterized the communist takeovers in South-East Asia. Almost the whole of the 1960s New Left followed. They opposed the American side and turned Ho Chi Minh and the Vietcong into romantic heroes.

When the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia in 1975 both Chomsky and the New Left welcomed it. And when news emerged of the extraordinary event that immediately followed, the complete evacuation of the capital Phnom Penh accompanied by reports of widespread killings, Chomsky offered a rationalization similar to those he had provided for the terror in China and Vietnam: there might have been some violence, but this was understandable under conditions of regime change and social revolution.

Although information was hard to come by, Chomsky suggested in an article in 1977 that post-war Cambodia was probably similar to France after liberation at the end of World War II when thousands of enemy collaborators were massacred within a few months. This was to be expected, he said, and was a small price to pay for the positive outcomes of the new government of Pol Pot. Chomsky cited a book by two American left-wing authors, Gareth Porter and George Hildebrand, who had "presented a carefully documented study of the destructive American impact on Cambodia and the success of the Cambodian revolutionaries in overcoming it, giving a very favorable picture of their programs and policies."

By this time, however, there were two other books published on Cambodia that took a very different line. The American authors John Barron and Anthony Paul called their work *Murder of a Gentle Land* and accused the Pol Pot regime of mass killings that amounted to genocide. François Ponchaud's *Cambodia Year Zero* repeated the charge.

Chomsky reviewed both books, together with a number of press articles, in *The Nation* in June 1977. He accused them of publishing little more than anti-communist propaganda. Articles in *The New York Times Magazine* and *The Christian Science Monitor* suggested that the death toll was between one and two million people out of a total population of 7.8 million. Chomsky mocked their total and picked at their sources, showing some were dubious and that a famous photograph of forced labor in the Cambodian countryside was actually a fake.

He dismissed the Barron and Paul book partly because it had been published by *Reader's Digest* and publicized on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, both of them notorious anti-communist publications, and partly because they had omitted to report the views of journalists who had been to Cambodia but not witnessed any executions.

Ponchaud's book was harder to ignore. It was based on the author's personal experience in Cambodia from 1965 until the capture of Phnom Penh, extensive interviews with refugees and reports from Cambodian radio. Moreover, it had been favorably reviewed by a left-wing author in *The New York Review of Books*, a publication for which Chomsky himself had often written. Chomsky's strategy was to undermine Ponchaud's book by questioning the credibility of his refugee testimony. Acknowledging that Ponchaud "gives a grisly account of what refugees have reported to him about the barbarity of their treatment at the hands of the Khmer Rouge," Chomsky said we should be wary of "the extreme unreliability of refugee reports":

> Refugees are frightened and defenseless, at the mercy of alien forces. They naturally tend to report what they believe their interlocutors wish to hear. While these reports must be considered seriously, care and caution are necessary. Specifically, refugees questioned by Westerners or Thais have a vested interest in reporting atrocities on the part of Cambodian revolutionaries, an obvious fact that no serious reporter will fail to take into account.

In 1980, Chomsky expanded this critique

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into the book *After the Cataclysm*, co-authored with his long-time collaborator Edward S. Herman. Ostensibly about Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the great majority of its content was a defense of the position Chomsky took on the Pol Pot regime. By this time, Chomsky was well aware that something terrible had happened: "The record of atrocities in Cambodia is substantial and often gruesome," he wrote. "There can be little doubt that the war was followed by an outbreak of violence, massacre and repression." He mocked the suggestion, however, that the death toll might have reached more than a million and attacked Senator George McGovern's call for military intervention to halt what McGovern called "a clear case of genocide."

Instead, Chomsky commended authors who apologized for the Pol Pot regime. He approvingly cited their analyses that the forced march of the population out of Phnom Penh was probably necessitated by the failure of the 1976 rice crop. If this was true, Chomsky wrote, "the evacuation of Phnom Penh, widely denounced at the time and since for its undoubted brutality, may actually have saved many lives." Chomsky rejected the charge of genocide, suggesting that

> the deaths in Cambodia were not the result of systematic slaughter and starvation organized by the state but rather attributable in large measure to peasant revenge, undisciplined military units out of government control, starvation and disease that are direct consequences of the US war, or other such factors.

After the Cataclysm also presented a much more extended critique of refugee testimony. Chomsky revealed his original 1977 source for this had been Ben Kiernan, at the time an Australian graduate student and apologist for the Pol Pot regime, who wrote in the Maoist-inspired *Melbourne Journal of Politics*. What Chomsky avoided telling his readers, however, was that well before 1980, the year *After the Cataclysm* was published, Kiernan himself had recanted his position.

Kiernan had spent much of 1978 and 1979 interviewing five hundred Cambodian refugees in camps inside Thailand. They persuaded him they were actually telling the truth. He also gained a mass of evidence from the new Vietnamese-installed regime. This led him to write a *mea culpa* in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1979. This was a left-wing journal frequently cited by Chomsky, so he must have been aware that Kiernan wrote: "There can be no doubting that the evidence also points clearly to a systematic use of violence against the population by that chauvinist section of the revolutionary movement that was led by Pol Pot." Yet in *After the Cataclysm*, Chomsky does not acknowledge this at all.

Kiernan later went on to write *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge 1975–79*, a book now widely regarded as the definitive analysis of one of the most appalling episodes in recorded history. In the evacuation of Phnom Penh in 1975, tens of thousands of people died. Almost the entire middle class was deliberately targeted and killed, including civil servants, teachers, intellectuals, and artists. No fewer than 68,000 Buddhist monks out of a total of 70,000 were executed. Fifty percent of urban Chinese were murdered.

Kiernan argues for a total death toll between April 1975 and January 1979, when the Vietnamese invasion put an end to the regime, of 1.67 million out of 7.89 million, or 21 percent of the entire population. This is proportionally the greatest mass killing ever inflicted by a government on its own population in modern times, probably in all history.

Chomsky was this regime's most prestigious and most persistent Western apologist. Even as late as 1988, when they were forced to admit in their book *Manufacturing Consent* that Pol Pot had committed genocide against his own people, Chomsky and Herman still insisted they had been right to reject the journalists and authors who had initially reported the

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story. The evidence that became available after the Vietnamese invasion of 1979, they maintained, did not retrospectively justify the reports they had criticized in 1977.

They were still adamant that the United States, who they claimed started it all, bore the brunt of the blame. In short, Chomsky still refused to admit how wrong he had been over Cambodia.

Chomsky has persisted with this pattern of behavior right to this day. In his response to September 11, he claimed that no matter how appalling the terrorists' actions, the United States had done worse. He supported his case with arguments and evidence just as empirically selective and morally duplicitous as those he used to defend Pol Pot. On September 12, 2001, Chomsky wrote:

> The terrorist attacks were major atrocities. In scale they may not reach the level of many others, for example, Clinton's bombing of the Sudan with no credible pretext, destroying half its pharmaceutical supplies and killing unknown numbers of people.

This Sudanese incident was an American missile attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum, where the CIA suspected Iraqi scientists were manufacturing the nerve agent VX for use in chemical weapons contracted by the Saddam Hussein regime. The missile was fired at night so that no workers would be there and the loss of innocent life would be minimised. The factory was located in an industrial area and the only apparent casualty at the time was the caretaker.

While Chomsky drew criticism for making such an odious comparison, he was soon able to flesh out his case. He told a reporter from salon.com that, rather than an "unknown" number of deaths in Khartoum, he now had credible statistics to show there were many more Sudanese victims than those killed in New York and Washington: "That one bombing, according to estimates made by the German Embassy in Sudan and Human Rights Watch, probably led to tens of thousands of deaths." However, this claim was quickly rendered suspect. One of his two sources, Human Rights Watch, wrote to salon.com the following week denying it had produced any such figure. Its communications director said: "In fact, Human Rights Watch has conducted no research into civilian deaths as the result of US bombing in Sudan and would not make such an assessment without a careful and thorough research mission on the ground."

Chomsky's second source had done no research into the matter either. He was Werner Daum, German ambassador to Sudan from 1996 to 2000 who wrote in the *Harvard International Review*, Summer 2001. Despite his occupation, Daum's article was anything but diplomatic.

It was a largely anti-American tirade criticizing the United States' international human rights record, blaming America for the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, accusing it of ignoring Iraq's gassing of the Kurds, and holding it responsible for the purported deaths of 600,000 Iraqi children as a result of post-1991 economic sanctions. Nonetheless, his comments on the death toll from the Khartoum bombing were not as definitive as Chomsky intimated. Daum wrote:

> It is difficult to assess how many people in this poor African country died as a result of the destruction of the Al-Shifa factory, but several tens of thousands seems a reasonable guess. The factory produced some of the basic medicines on the World Health Organization list, covering 20 to 60 percent of Sudan's market and 100 percent of the market for intravenous liquids. It took more than three months for these products to be replaced with imports.

Now, it is hard to take seriously Daum's claim that this "guess" was in any way "reasonable." He said there was a three-month gap between the destruction of the factory and the time it took to replace its products with imports. This seems an implausibly long interval to ship pharmaceuti-

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cals but, even if true, it is fanciful to suggest that "several tens of thousands" of people would have died in such a brief period.

Had they done so, they must have succumbed to a highly visible medical crisis, a pandemic to put the SARS outbreak in the shade. Yet no one on the spot, apart from the German ambassador, seems to have heard of it.

Anyone who makes an Internet search of the reports of the Sudanese operations of the several Western aid agencies, including Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, and Norwegian People's Aid, who have been operating in this region for decades, will not find any evidence of an unusual increase in the death toll at the time. Instead, their major health concern, then and now, has been how the Muslim Marxist government in Khartoum was waging civil war by bombing the civilian hospitals of its Christian enemies in the south of the country.

The idea that tens of thousands of Sudanese would have died within three months from a shortage of pharmaceuticals is implausible enough in itself. That this could have happened without any of the aid organizations noticing or complaining is simply unbelievable.

Hence Chomsky's rationalization for the September 11 attacks is every bit as deceitful as his apology for Pol Pot and his misreading of the Cambodian genocide.

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies," Chomsky wrote in a famous article in *The New York Review of Books* in February 1967. This was not only a well-put and memorable statement but was also a good indication of his principal target. Most of his adult life has been spent in the critique of other intellectuals who, he claims, have not fulfilled their duty.

The central argument of *American Power and the New Mandarins* is that the humanities and social sciences had been captured by a new breed of intellectuals. Rather than acting as Socratic free thinkers challenging received opinion, they had betrayed their calling by becoming servants of the military-industrial state. The interests of this new mandarin class, he argued, had turned the United States into an imperial power. Their ideology demonstrated

> the mentality of the colonial civil servant, persuaded of the benevolence of the mother country and the correctness of its vision of world order, and convinced that he understands the true interests of the backward peoples whose welfare he is to administer.

Chomsky named the academic fields he regarded as the worst offenders—psychology, sociology, systems analysis, and political science—and held up some well-known practitioners, including Samuel Huntington of Harvard, as among the worst examples. The Vietnam War, Chomsky claimed, was designed and executed by the new mandarins.

In itself, Chomsky's identification of the emergence of a new type of academically trained official was neither original nor radical. Similar critiques had been made of the same phenomenon in both western and eastern Europe for some time. Much of his critique had been anticipated in the 1940s in a book from the other end of the political spectrum, Friedrich von Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, which identified the social engineers of the welfare state as the greatest internal threats to Western liberty. Chomsky offered a leftist version of the same idea, writing:

> There are dangerous tendencies in the ideology of the welfare state intelligentsia who claim to possess the technique and understanding required to manage our "postindustrial society" and to organize the international society dominated by the American superpower.

Yet at the very time he was making this critique, Chomsky himself was playing at social engineering on an even grander scale. As he indicated in his support in 1967 for the "collectivization and communization"

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of Chinese and Vietnamese agriculture, with its attendant terror and mass slaughter, he had sought the calculated reorganization of traditional societies. By his advocacy of revolutionary change throughout Asia, he was seeking to play a role in the reorganization of the international order as well.

Hence, apart from occupying a space on the political spectrum much further to the left than the academics he criticized, and apart from his preference for bloodshed over more bureaucratic techniques, Chomsky himself was the very exemplar of the new mandarin he purported to despise.

He was, in fact, one of the more successful examples of the breed. There has now been enough analysis of the Vietnam War to demonstrate conclusively that the United States was not defeated militarily. South Vietnam was abandoned to its fate because of the war's political costs at home. The influence of radical intellectuals like Chomsky in persuading the student generation of the 1960s to oppose the war was crucial in elevating these political costs to an intolerable level.

The result they helped produce, however, was far worse than any bureaucratic solution that might have emanated from the behavioral sciences of the 1960s. From our present vantage point, we can today see the long-term outcome of the choice Chomsky posed in 1967 between the "comparative costs" of revolutionary terror in Vietnam versus the continuation of private enterprise agriculture in the Philippines.

The results all favor the latter. In 2001, the average GDP per head in the Philippines was $4000. At the same time, twenty-five years of revolution in Vietnam had produced a figure of only half as much, a mere $2100. Even those Vietnamese who played major roles in the transformation are now dismayed at the outcome. The former Vietcong General Pham Xuan An said in 1999: "All that talk about 'liberation' twenty, thirty years ago, all the plotting, all the bodies, produced this, this impoverished broken-down country led by a gang of cruel and paternalistic half-educated theorists."

These "half-educated theorists" were the very mandarins Chomsky and his supporters so badly wanted to succeed and worked so hard to install.

As well as social science practitioners and bureaucrats, the other representatives of the intelligentsia to whom Chomsky has long been hostile are the people who work in the news media.

Although his politics made him famous, Chomsky has made no substantial contribution to political theory. Almost all his political books are collections of short essays, interviews, speeches, and newspaper opinion pieces about current events. The one attempt he made at a more thoroughgoing analysis was the work he produced in 1988 with Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. This book, however, must have been a disappointment to his followers.

Media studies is a huge field ranging from traditional defenses of the news media as the fourth estate of the democratic system, to the most arcane cultural analyses produced by radical postmodernist theorists. Chomsky and Herman gave no indication they had digested any of it.

Instead, their book offers a crude analysis that would have been at home in an old Marxist pamphlet from the 1930s. Apart from the introduction, most of the book is simply a re-hash of the authors' previously published work criticizing media coverage of events in central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) and in southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), plus one chapter on reporting of the 1981 KGB-Bulgarian plot to kill the Pope.

To explain the role of the mass media, Chomsky and Herman offer their "propaganda model." This claims the function of the media is

> to amuse, entertain and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and

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> major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda.

This is true, they maintain, whether the media operate in liberal democracies or under totalitarian regimes. The only difference is that in communist and other authoritarian societies, it is clear to everyone that the media are instruments of the dominant elite. In capitalist societies, however, this fact is concealed, since the media "actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest."

Chomsky and Herman argue that these attacks on authority are always very limited and the claims of free speech are merely smokescreens for inculcating the economic and political agendas of the privileged groups that dominate the economy.

The media, they note, are all owned by large corporations, they are beholden for their income to major national advertisers, most news is generated by large multinational news agencies, and any newspaper or television station that steps out of line is bombarded with "flak" or letters, petitions, lawsuits, and speeches from pro-capitalist institutes set up for this very purpose.

There are, however, two glaring omissions from their analysis: the role of journalists and the preferences of media audiences. Nowhere do the authors explain how journalists and other news producers come to believe they are exercising their freedom to report the world as they see it. Chomsky and Herman simply assert these people have been duped into seeing the world through a pro-capitalist ideological lens.

Nor do they attempt any analysis of why millions of ordinary people exercise their free choice every day to buy newspapers and tune in to radio and television programs. Chomsky and Herman fail to explain why readers and viewers so willingly accept the world-view of capitalist media proprietors. They provide no explanation for the tastes of media audiences.

This view of both journalists and audiences as easily-led, ideological dupes of the powerful is not just a fantasy of Chomsky and Herman's own making. It is also a stance that reveals an arrogant and patronising contempt for everyone who does not share their politics. The disdain inherent in this outlook was revealed during an exchange between Chomsky and a questioner at a conference in 1989 (reproduced in Chomsky, *Understanding Power*, 2002):

> Man: The only poll I've seen about journalists is that they are basically narcissistic and left of center.
>
> Chomsky: Look, what people call "left of center" doesn't mean anything—it means they're conventional liberals and conventional liberals are very state-oriented, and usually dedicated to private power.

In short, Chomsky believes that only he and those who share his radical perspective have the ability to rise above the illusions that keep everyone else slaves of the system. Only he can see things as they really are.

Since the European Enlightenment a number of prominent intellectuals have presented themselves as secular Christ-like figures, lonely beacons of light struggling to survive in a dark and corrupting world. This is a tactic that has often delivered them followers among students and other idealistic youths in late adolescence.

The phenomenon has been most successful when accompanied by an uncomplicated morality that its constituency can readily absorb. In his ruminations on September 11, Chomsky reiterated his own apparently direct and simple moral principles. Reactions to the terrorist attacks, he said, "should meet the most elementary moral standards: specifically, if an action is right for us, it is right for others; and if it is wrong for others, it is wrong for us."

Unfortunately, like his declaration of the responsibility of the intellectual to speak the truth and expose lies, Chomsky himself has

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consistently demonstrated an inability to abide by his own standards. Among his most provocative recent demands are for American political and military leaders to be tried as war criminals. He has often couched this in terms of the failure by the United States to apply the same standards to itself as it does to its enemies.

For instance, America tried and executed the remaining World War Two leaders of Germany and Japan, but failed to try its own personnel for the "war crime" of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan. Chomsky claims the American bombing of dams during the Korean War was "a huge war crime . . . just like racist fanaticism" but the action was praised at home. "That's just a couple of years after they hanged German leaders who were doing much less than that."

The worst current example, he claims, is American support for Israel:

> virtually everything that Israel is doing, meaning the United States and Israel are doing, is illegal, in fact, a war crime. And many of them they defined as "grave breaches," that is, serious war crimes. This means that the United States and Israeli leadership should be brought to trial.

Yet Chomsky's moral perspective is completely one-sided. No matter how great the crimes of the regimes he has favored, such as China, Vietnam, and Cambodia under the communists, Chomsky has never demanded their leaders be captured and tried for war crimes. Instead, he has defended these regimes for many years to the best of his ability through the use of evidence he must have realized was selective, deceptive, and in some cases invented.

In fact, had Pol Pot ever been captured and tried in a Western court, Chomsky's writings could have been cited as witness for the defense. Were the same to happen to Osama bin Laden, Chomsky's moral rationalizations in his most recent book—"almost any crime, a crime in the street, a war, whatever it may be, there's usually something behind it that has elements of legitimacy"—could be used to plead for a lighter sentence.

This kind of two-faced morality has provided a model for the world-wide protests by left-wing opponents of the American-led coalition's war against Iraq. The left was willing to tolerate the most hideous acts of state terrorism by the Saddam Hussein regime, but was implacable in its hostility to intervention by Western democratic governments in the interests of both their own security and the emancipation of the Iraqi people. This is hypocrisy writ large.

The long political history of this aging activist demonstrates that double standards of the same kind have characterized his entire career.

Chomsky has declared himself a libertarian and anarchist but has defended some of the most authoritarian and murderous regimes in human history. His political philosophy is purportedly based on empowering the oppressed and toiling masses but he has contempt for ordinary people who he regards as ignorant dupes of the privileged and the powerful. He has defined the responsibility of the intellectual as the pursuit of truth and the exposure of lies, but has supported the regimes he admires by suppressing the truth and perpetrating falsehoods. He has endorsed universal moral principles but has only applied them to Western liberal democracies, while continuing to rationalize the crimes of his own political favorites. He is a mandarin who denounces mandarins. When caught out making culpably irresponsible misjudgments, as he was over Cambodia and Sudan, he has never admitted he was wrong.

Today, Chomsky's hypocrisy stands as the most revealing measure of the sorry depths to which the left-wing political activism he has done so much to propagate has now sunk.

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Minimalist fantasies

by Roger Kimball

All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion. . . . What you see is what you see.
—Frank Stella, 1966

Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper. . . . That, precisely, is the trouble. Minimal Art remains too much a feat if ideation, and not enough anything else. Its idea remains an idea, something deduced instead of felt and discovered.
—Clement Greenberg, 1967

After all, what is art? That's the big question.
—Leonard Riggio, Dia Arts Foundation

Art is what you can get away with.
—Andy Warhol (attributed)

Where is Evelyn Waugh when you need him? I mean, where is the satirist with a boot big and swift and hard enough for the collective backside of today's art world? "The hour is come," Sir Walter Scott indited gloomily, "but not the man."

I share that gloom. There is plenty of good art being made now, but most of it goes unnoticed, all but. The big press and the big money tend to line up behind "transgressive" crap (the blasphemy, kinky sex, bodily effluvia brigade) or utterly vacuous crap (the blank canvas, exhibit-my-old-sneaker, I-can-count-to-three-million-and-make-you-watch-me-do-it company).

I apologize, by the way, for the word "crap." I think it's undignified, too. I looked around for an alternative that was equally accurate, blunt, and printable. I considered "*merde*," but it seemed a bit pretentious for the matter at hand, and besides, it's French. "Crap" at least is short, sharp, and expressive. It has the added advantage of being apt: "CRAP, *n*. . . . 3. a. Worthless nonsense," *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

I should also point out that the "or" between "transgressive" and "utterly vacuous" is is not what grammarians call a disjunctive "or." There are some—many—enterprising lads and lasses who manage to be transgressive and vacuous simultaneously. Take Matthew "Mr. Vaseline" Barney. He will be forgotten in about twenty minutes, but just now *The New York Times*'s publicity blitz on his behalf is still reverberating (and, as I write, his occupation of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is still ongoing). In Mr. Barney's work, I think you will admit, the union of banality and ickiness (common parlance for "transgressive") is well-nigh perfect.

He is not alone. I am sure that you can think of eighty-six additional examples—I'm told that experts can do 114—before lunch.

I want to spare you that unpleasantness, however. My point is simply that when it comes to the Art World—to the congeries of critic-publicists and curator-publicists, museum-director-publicists, publicist-publicists, and artist-narcissist-publicists who set

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the agenda and spend the money—the front-burner issue is not aesthetic quality but one or another species of trendiness. When exhibitions of Velázquez or Leonardo or some other historical name-brand worthy roll into town, you can reap some reasonably straight oohs and aahs from the arts pages of the *Times* and other finger-in-the-air publications. But let the focus shift to what's happening now and, presto! instant lobotomy and onset of Tourette Syndrome.

Matthew Barney notwithstanding, I suspect that the really nasty stuff is about ready for a rest—not a long rest, mind you, just a bit of a breather while people regroup after the age of Mapplethorpe, Serrano, Gilbert and George, and all the awful stuff that made "Sensation" such a sensation a couple of years ago. (Remember the Madonna covered with pornographic pictures and bits of elephant poop? Wot larks, wot larks. . .) Doubtless there is something even worse going up somewhere even as I write. But for the moment it seems that the limelight has shifted from the overtly repellent to the merely vacuous side of the equation.

What makes me think this? Palpitations at *The New York Times*, in part. I am thinking in particular of "The Dia Generation" by the *Times*'s chief art critic, Michael Kimmelman. This extraordinary, sixty-five-hundred-word effusion—about which more below—plumped up the paper's Sunday Magazine on April 6. It was followed by another ecstatic piece, which began on the front page of the paper's art section on April 23. The hook for all this publicity is "Dia:Beacon," a new $50 million art museum in Beacon, New York, about an hour north of Manhattan. Presided over by the Dia Arts Foundation, Dia:Beacon—note the snazzy pomo orthography—opens on May 18. Look for lots more fanfare then.

Dia:Beacon is the latest effort to enlist art in the cause of urban renewal. Here is the formula: Take one economically depressed town in or near a scenic spot. Stir in a clump of abandoned commercial buildings, the older the better. Gently whip up local authorities with the promise that a museum of contemporary art will boost tourism, create jobs, and generally add cultural luster to their town. Decorate with a hip director, preferably someone who was a student-friend-assistant of Thomas Krens at Williams College. Let gel with as much foundation and taxpayer money as you can make off with.

Does it work? The jury is still out. Mass MOCA in North Adams, Massachusetts, helped establish the recipe in 1999 and it has had only modest success. Michael Govan, the current director of the Dia Arts Foundation (and an alumnus of Williams and the Guggenheim), estimated that the museum would create twenty jobs, attract about 100,000 visitors a year, and generate $7.4 million annually in tourist revenue. Maybe.

Doubtless you have heard of the Dia Arts Foundation, though probably it is not in the forefront of your consciousness. It hadn't been in the news much lately. Dia was one of the many potty ideas with roots in the 1960s that didn't get going until the 1970s, and now, like eczema or PCBs, is almost impossible to extirpate. Why "Dia"? It's Greek for "through," as in "Can't you see through this ridiculous sham?" Dia was started in 1974 by a German art dealer named Heiner Friedrich and his wife, Philippa de Menil. Herr Friedrich supplied the pretension, most of it; Miss de Menil—a daughter of the art collectors Dominique and John de Menil, and hence an heiress to the Schlumberger oil fortune—supplied the money, lots of it. According to Kimmelman, by the mid-1980s, Dia had spent $40 million on 1,000 works of art.

The senior Menils went in for things like shrines to Mark Rothko. The Rothko Chapel at the de Menil Collection in Houston features a clutch of dark-hued abstractions by The Master set in the hushed preciousness of what some press material calls "a modern meditative environment." Indeed. A step or two away from the meditative modernity of the new-age crystals-are-gods crowd, the Rothko Chapel is

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. . . well, let's call it unforgettable. The senior Menils extended themselves in exquisiteness: elegant architecture, expensive simplicity, the cool, uncluttered look of what might be called Catholic Zen. The younger generation brought this down to earth. They went in for artists like Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, John Chamberlain, Andy Warhol, Walter De Maria, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin, and Bruce Nauman. Minimalist, mostly, but by turns louder, coyer, angrier, more ironic—minimalism with neon, dirt, rocks, or crushed sedans.

Dia already runs or has run several other galleries and art spaces. It helped start the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh with a donation of 150 works by Warhol and the Cy Twombly Gallery in Houston with half-a-dozen works. In Manhattan, Dia runs some cavernous galleries (totaling some 38,000 square feet) in Chelsea and—possibly its most notorious undertaking to date—Walter De Maria's *New York Earth Room* (1977) in SoHo. *The New York Earth Room* is exactly what its name says: a room in New York filled with earth. Well, not filled, exactly. This "interior earth sculpture" consists of 250 cubic yards of earth—i.e., dirt—spread over 3,600 square feet of floor space at a carefully manicured depth of twenty-two inches. The room, which is regularly cleaned and purged of mushrooms and other organic intrusions, is solemnly chaperoned by a couple of Dia employees who are discouraged from reading lest their attention wander.

Like most of the artists associated with Dia, Walter De Maria might have stepped out of a farce by Tom Wolfe. *The New York Earth Room* is not his only sandbox for Dia. Elsewhere in Manhattan is *The Broken Kilometer* (1979). I can't improve on Dia's official description: "500 highly polished, round, solid brass rods, each measuring two meters in length and five centimeters (two inches) in diameter. The 500 rods are placed in five parallel rows of 100 rods each." As Frank Stella said of his own work—more on that in a moment—"what you see is what you see." And then there is *Lightning Field* (1977), De Maria's site-specific effort near Quemado, New Mexico. *Lightning Field* consists of four hundred stainless-steel poles, twenty feet long, two inches round, which are arranged in a mile-long, kilometer-wide grid in that desolate Western fastness. Dia spent $1 million on *Lightning Field*, which may help explain why they claim it is "recognized internationally as one of the late-twentieth century's most significant works of art." In case you were thinking of dropping in for a quick look, don't. Overnight reservations (one night only) are required in a cabin that Dia maintains next to the field; "a simple supper (vegetarian) is prepared for you." That meal may seem by-the-by, but it isn't. Everything about Dia is "(vegetarian)."

Dia owns and maintains Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a 1500-foot long, 15-foot wide coil of basalt rock and earth in the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Smithson inadvertently built the earth-work when the water level of the lake was unusually low, so the work is now often submerged. Dia also helped with Michael Heizer's *City*, an unfinished (after 30 years) series of huge abstract sculptures in the Nevada desert. "Heizer," Kimmelman reports,

> imagined "complexes," immense mastabas, some a quarter of a mile long, with 70-foot slabs weighing thousands of pounds. He acquired several square miles of remote property, surrounded by public land, two hours into the Nevada desert from the nearest paved road, and he lived for years in a trailer, locked in for half the winter and once going for months seeing only a couple of sheep trailers and a passing pickup truck. Art didn't get much more extreme than that.

Note the word "extreme": it's meant as a term of praise.

Then there is the Dan Flavin Institute in Bridgehampton, New York, which contains nine works in fluorescent lights by Flavin. A

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typical work by Flavin consists of a handful of standard-issue fluorescent lights arranged in a line. In 1979, Dia spent $5 million to purchase a sprawling disused army base in Marfa, Texas, and help Donald Judd construct a museum for his own work and that of a few artists he especially admired, like Flavin. Dan Flavin liked light bulbs. Donald Judd liked boxes, stacked one on top of another or arranged in a row. At Marfa, he could really let himself go. Until it fell on rocky times in the late 1980s, Dia supplied him with a stipend of $17,500 a month. One result was Judd's *100 Untitled Works in Mill Aluminum* (1982–1986), which are—no surprise here—one hundred large untitled boxes made out of milled aluminum and neatly arranged in two enormous converted artillery sheds.

Friedrich, who was removed as director of Dia in the late 1980s when the Foundation's finances tanked, was never shy about Dia's aspirations. According to Kimmelman, he compared Dia's patronage to that of the Medicis. "Our values are as powerful as those in the Renaissance," Friedrich is quoted as saying. He added that Dan Flavin "is as important as Michelangelo." Think about that the next time you switch on the fluorescent lights in your office.

I offer these snapshots of the Dia Foundation's activities as a sort of reality check. Bear in mind the room full of dirt, the steel poles cluttering up the New Mexico landscape, the light bulbs and the aluminum boxes. Think about Andy Warhol—his Campbell's Soup cans and Brillo Boxes, his pictures of Marilyn Monroe and Mao and Jackie Kennedy. Think about *Spiral Jetty*, John Chamberlain and his crushed cars, Richard Serra and his minatory Corten Steel walls. Now think about Michael Kimmelman's assertion that the perpetrators of these objects constitute "the greatest generation of American artists."

> They were the first Americans to influence Europeans. The work these artists made changed, or at least questioned, the nature of art: what it looked like, its size, its materials, its attitude toward the places where it was shown, its relation to architecture, light and space and to the land. The artists even questioned whether art needed to be a tangible object. Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Earth art, video art, Conceptualism—suddenly art could be nothing more than an idea, a thought on a piece of paper that played in your head. It could be ephemeral or atmospheric, like the experience of a room illuminated by colored fluorescent tubes.

I described Michael Kimmelman's essay as "extraordinary." It is extraordinary in approximately the same way that a snake-oil peddler's tales of miraculous cures are extraordinary, i.e., cynical, incredible, and ultimately pathetic.

Let's start with some details. The artists of the so-called "Dia generation" were not the "first Americans to influence Europeans." For better or worse, that trophy belongs to the generation whose achievement Kimmelman is at such pains to depreciate, the generation of "Pollock, Rothko, and de Kooning." In 1958, Alfred Barr organized an exhibition called "The New American Painting," which toured Europe at the same time that a retrospective of Jackson Pollock's work was making the rounds. "The immediate effect of these exhibitions," Hilton Kramer has written, was "to establish the Abstract Expressionism of the New York School as the the single most important art movement of its period" in the minds of young Parisians. Annette Michelson, at that time the Paris correspondent for *Arts* magazine, noted in its June 1959 issue that "the one really lively topic of discussion" among Paris artists, dealers, and critics was the new American painting. Barr's show, she conjectured, "might even come to be seen as the 'the Armory Show of post-war Paris.'"

Those acquainted with Kimmelman's other writings on art might be tempted to regard his factual mistake as the product of simple ignorance. The sums of money involved make that very unlikely. Dia's aes-

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thetic may be minimalist, but its pocketbook is maximalist. According to the April 23 story in the *Times*, Leonard Riggio, chairman of Barnes & Noble and now also Dia's Chairman, has given some $30 million towards Dia:Beacon, as well as several art works including Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* (1997), which were on view for over nine months at Dia's Chelsea gallery. The Lannan Foundation has given or lent the new museum another $15 million. When such sums are involved, it is a simple matter to let enthusiasm trump accuracy.

Since I started with Evelyn Waugh, I should acknowledge that there is one brilliant moment in Kimmelman's piece that, though inadvertent, is worthy of Waugh at his most comic. It comes in the course of his interview with Leonard Riggio. "I went to Marfa and Roden Crater and visited Heizer in Nevada," Riggio recalls, "and I thought these artists recognized the genius of the average American. Judd built his museum in a little Texas town. [James] Turrell was hiring Native Americans from the area. Heizer was working with local people." In other words, we are supposed to regard Judd's aluminum boxes or Heizer's giant slabs in the middle of nowhere as art for the people, just as Barnes & Noble bookstores are "for average citizens, for the whole of society." It would be an art work worthy of Dia to try out, say, the room full of dirt on a randomly selected group of average citizens. I hope I am invited to witness the result.

Leonard Riggio is not really a comedian, of course. He makes a serious point—a deeply misguided point, I believe, but nonetheless serious—with his assertion that the question "What is Art?" is "the big question." In fact, the last half century has shown it to be one of the most vacuous questions ever formulated. Whatever interest it might hold for epistemologists, it has proven to be an artistic dead end—worse than a dead end, an endless maze that leads nowhere. Marcel Duchamp posed, and disposed, of the essential issue back in the 'Teens with his ready-mades: ordinary objects torn out of their quotidian surroundings and exhibited as art. He intended to explode the category of aesthetic delectation, but it turned out he had only introduced an element of ironic frivolity. "I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge," Duchamp noted contemptuously in the 1940s, "and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."

There was a period, a decade or two ago, when you could hardly open an art journal without encountering the quotation from Frank Stella I used as an epigraph. The bit about "what you see is what you see" was reproduced *ad nauseam*. It was thought by some to be very deep. In fact, Stella's remarks—from a joint interview with him and Donald Judd—serve chiefly to underscore the artistic emptiness of the whole project of minimalism. No one can argue with the proposition that "what you see is what you see," but there's a lot to argue with in what he calls "the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion." We do not, of course, *see* ideas. Stella's assertion to the contrary might be an instance of verbal carelessness, but it is not merely verbal carelessness. At the center of minimalism, as Clement Greenberg noted, is the triumph of ideation over feeling and perception, over *aesthetics*. The artists Dia has supported form a disparate group. Not all are minimalists—Warhol, for example, or Chamberlain. But all specialize in art which flirts with what Greenberg called "the look of non-art." They, too—or at least their supporters—thought that "What is art?" was "the big question." In fact, it is the kind of question that, when pursued as a substitute for artistic practice, leads directly to rooms full of dirt and sad fellows living for years in a trailer in the Nevada desert. It also leads to charlatans like Judd, who exploded in a rage when his monthly stipend had to be stopped, and it leads, too, to judgments like Friedrich's that Dan Flavin is "as important as Michelangelo." It leads, in other words, to a view Andy Warhol is said to have endorsed, that "art is what you can get away with."

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Can Europe happen?

by Leszek Kolakowski

In September 1946, when Winston Churchill, speaking at the University of Zurich, was calling for the creation of a United States of Europe, parts of that continent still lay in ruins; the wounds of war had not yet scarred over. There were zones of occupation, but Germany had not yet split into two separate states. Churchill attributed both world wars to the German lust for domination and believed that a united Europe, with a Franco-German alliance at its center, would in time erase the memory of past horrors and make it impossible for Germany ever again to rekindle the fires of war.

Similar arguments in favor of European unification are often heard today, especially among the French: a united Europe, it is said, will be able to check Germany's imperialist tendencies. Of course we are all aware that Europe's history is also one of wars, some of them appallingly bloody and destructive, and that in this history there are no innocent parties: all European nations have massacres, invasions, and aggressive raids on their conscience. And although in 1946 it was natural to attribute the cause of the war to Hitler, the Soviet Union played a considerable part in the proceedings, beginning with the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact and the plan of a joint partition of Poland by two imperialist powers with an insatiable lust for conquest, powers temporarily allied but both knowing full well what their alliance was worth. In his Zurich speech Churchill hardly mentioned the Soviet Union; it is unclear whether he believed that it, too, could be civilized, transformed from a barbarian empire into a country that could join the European family and participate in it on equal terms, rather than as a conquering power brandishing its whip—now in the form of atomic weapons.

Today, more than half a century later, after the fall of the communist regimes and after so much effort by so many, we like to believe that a United Europe, if it can be brought about, will permanently remove the specter of war from our horizon. But we do not know whether it can succeed; we do not yet know what kind of Europe it will be nor how—in what sense—it will be united. We have seen, over the years, how fraught with difficulty was the process of unification, how greatly hampered by particular national interests: British beef, French apples, Spanish wine—the list goes on. And indeed it could hardly have been otherwise: all these particular interests are real, not imaginary, and one cannot demand too many sacrifices of member states in a situation where each wants to preserve its own interests and wrest as many concessions as possible from the others. The interests of farmers and industrialists, the issues of unemployment and inflation—these are real issues, and we have far to go before all the conflicting interests we see today will flourish in blissful harmony. Human interests inevitably conflict, and we cannot aim to eliminate such conflicts. We can only try

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to work out efficient mechanisms to resolve them through compromise, rather than war.

In England the debate about Europe has long been dominated by the issue of the Euro—a currency whose name is pronounced differently in every member state. The arguments put forward by many economists against a common currency seem convincing: it would entail the imposition of a uniform tax system and interest rate in all the member states, and the central bank, whose decisions would be independent of governments, would play the decisive role. Thus the two basic mechanisms of regulating the economy—the tax system and the interest rate—would, critics say, be taken out of the hands of particular states. States would also forfeit the possibility of manipulating their own inflation and debt. At the same time, given that the economic cycles of the various countries are not synchronized, the imposition of rigid rules by international institutions could harm parts of the Union. Britain's forced exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism was perhaps an unpleasant shock, but in the end, these critics say, it was beneficial, bringing a lower inflation rate and lower unemployment; it did nothing to strengthen the argument for a common currency. And the argument that a common currency will put a stop to currency speculation seems weak, since there will always be a sufficient number of other currencies to speculate with.

I am reluctant to discuss these issues further, because—like the great majority of Europe's citizens—I am not competent to do so. Even those who are competent often differ in their analyses; sometimes (rarely) they even admit that their past diagnosis may have been wrong. We have no reliable authority to which we could turn. But the situation has become worrying: a crisis of the common currency would now be a crisis for Europe as a whole, and in all respects. So if the common currency does not succeed, everyone will have to pretend otherwise. If there is a referendum in Britain about joining the Euro, its outcome, given the inevitable and incurable incompetence of the voters, will be an act of uninformed will, not of reason, and a positive outcome will not mean that joining the Euro will be beneficial, either for Britain or for Europe as a whole. The majority need not be right; witchhunts and the death penalty were abolished by parliaments against the will of the majority.

Moreover, there is a peculiar asymmetry to a referendum on the issue: if the majority vote is against a common currency, after a while there will be a second referendum, and then a third, until finally, one day, the majority votes in favor. But it will not be given the opportunity to revoke or modify its decision; there will be no going back, no new referendum. The decision to join will be a one-way street: once we enter the cage, we cannot leave, except perhaps in the event of some unimaginable catastrophe. So although, as I say, I am not competent to pronounce on these matters, I am inclined to side with those who say: yes to a common market, no to a common currency. (And in this, in England, I am in good company.) And I would be in favor of such an arrangement for Poland, which—again, barring some cataclysmic event—will soon be joining the European Union.

Objections to the European Union as a whole, and to a common currency in particular, arise not out of rational calculation but from fears about the loss of sovereignty. Another factor is the irritation felt at the often onerous and humiliating rules and restrictions imposed on particular states by the Brussels bureaucracy. People think: here we've been producing this cheese for a thousand years, everyone perfectly happy, and suddenly Brussels comes along with an order to change the way it's produced, allegedly for reasons of "health safety."

It sometimes seems as if thousands of bureaucrats, richly paid by Europe and dispensed from paying taxes, sit around thinking up more and more utterly useless but extremely irksome rules and regulations about cucumbers, jams, or carrots. This naturally

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leads to the suspicion that, first, no harm would be done if most of them were got rid of, and, second, that they are people of a totalitarian mentality, their ideal a world where everything is identical, all historically evolved diversity eradicated and everyone forced into an identical way of life. Objections against this are understandable and right.

It is equally understandable that people should object to the discarding of certain political institutions and traditions because they do not fit well into the proposed European scheme of things. Take, for example, the British House of Lords. Its members are not democratically elected; it could be perceived, like the monarchy, as an anachronism. But it has been around for centuries, and although it is not elected by universal ballot and enjoys very limited legislative powers, it has, on the whole, played a very positive role in reforms; one cannot say that it has exercised despotic rule over the people against their will. True, it does not fit well with modern democracy, but neither do the processes that lead to the emergence of cultural, financial, or industrial elites—elites on which the stability and flourishing of the country ultimately depend. The point of democratic institutions is to ensure that the significance and influence of political elites more or less correspond to the degree of trust society places in them; they are not meant to produce those elites themselves. Democratic elections will not pick out the best footballers, the most illustrious scholars or poets, the most efficient managers.

What about sovereignty? It is no good saying that the process of European unification does not infringe on state sovereignty, for patently it does. Sovereignty is being gradually eroded and will go on being eroded even more. To say that a state is sovereign, however, does not mean that it can simply ignore the existence, interests, and aspirations of other states. Not even the United States is sovereign in this sense. A state is sovereign not by virtue of the fact that no restrictions are placed upon it by other states, nor by virtue of its (unrealizable in practice) economic autarchy, but by virtue of the fact that it makes its own decisions, for good or for ill, and those decisions are still its decisions even when they are dictated by circumstances or by the actions of other states. A state that makes a decision because of a threat from its neighbors has not thereby forfeited its sovereignty, for it is free to decide otherwise, even if such a decision is against its interests.

A state does forfeit it sovereignty, however, if there is a mechanism that invests other states with the power to make decisions in its name or without its agreement. The countries of the Soviet bloc were not sovereign because the central authorities in Moscow had the power, in important matters, to make decisions which were binding on the formally independent states of the bloc. When decisions on important issues are voted through by a majority of the European Union's members, with no right of veto, the member states have forfeited their sovereignty, for they are forced to implement those decisions whether they like it or not. Admittedly, in the case of the European Union the member states—unlike the countries of the Soviet bloc—made a sovereign decision to join; thus one can say that they freely forfeited their sovereignty. But one cannot say that they did not forfeit it. It is only in matters where a right to veto applies that sovereignty remains intact.

But the question needs to be asked whether these (considerable) restrictions on sovereignty should be viewed as genuinely disastrous. In a country like Britain, very strongly attached to its fully sovereign parliament, many people do indeed react with horror to the prospect of a federal Europe—a "superstate," as they call it. For them this is a natural, instinctive reaction, but the same is not necessarily true of other countries, which tend rather to weigh up the benefits and risks—although their calculations often turn out to have been wrong.

People often say: they want to take away our sovereignty, and that means destroying our national identity. But this is a dubious

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argument, and the fear is greatly disproportionate to the threat. Certain ethnic groups, whether tribes or nations, can die out either because they have been physically exterminated by their enemies or because they are culturally too weak to resist the influence of other civilizations and end up being absorbed by them. There are no more Hittites, Visigoths, or Prussians; no more Etruscans; the Vandals, the Jadzwings, the Aztecs, the Cornish, the Samoyeds, and countless other tribes have disappeared. The forced russification of the nations of the USSR, much more effective than the policies of the tsars, did aim to eradicate non-Russian cultures, to destroy their languages, to melt small nations into the great Russian mass. But where force is not used and national differences are not deliberately destroyed—as in the European Union—a nation could cease to exist only if it did not want to exist: if it chose, of its own accord, to be incorporated into another national niche.

None of the well-rooted and culturally active nations of Europe, neither the Poles nor the French, are threatened in this way. Cultural assimilation can be successfully resisted even when the pressure is great. The Poles successfully resisted both russification and germanization through countless periods of occupation. The Irish have managed to retain their identity despite the violent efforts of the English (though their language, Gaelic, came close to being totally wiped out). The Icelanders survived—poor fishermen for centuries trampled underfoot by the Danish nobility; the Basques survived, even though they never had a country of their own; even the Catalans survived (I say "even" because the similarities between Catalan and Castilian seem, on the face of it, to favor linguistic assimilation); the Bretons and the Welsh are still there. The Poles could lose their national identity within the European Union only if they wanted to lose it—which is highly unlikely, given that they are one of the very few examples in Europe, and even in the world, of a state that is both nationally and culturally almost homogeneous.

We have become accustomed to thinking of sovereignty as the attribute of a nation state. But the nation state is a relatively recent invention and is rarely encountered in its ideal form. It is by no means obvious that only a nation can be a sovereign subject. Part of a nation, or a group of nations, can equally well be sovereign. Indeed, what is there to prevent me declaring that I am a separate nation, and demanding that my territory be recognized as sovereign?

Nor is it possible to construct a definition of nationhood that would fit every nation smoothly and provide an infallible criterion for deciding who may claim sovereignty and who may not. If a nation genuinely desires sovereignty and is willing to pay the price circumstances demand (for instance, by refusing to join the Common Market, which is a condition for membership in the European Union), it has the right to do so. But if part of a nation declares itself to be a nation, it, too, has that right.

Language creates difficulties. There is an independence movement in Corsica, where some locals claim that their language is not a French dialect but a proper language, with distinct historical roots (a question on which I do not have an opinion). There is also a Basque independence movement. The Ukrainians, the Croats, the Slovenians, the Slovaks—all have established their own national statehood for the first time. Soon the Palestinians may follow suit. Nations can die, but they can also come into being. And as we progress along the road to European unification, separatist and nationalist movements come out of the woodwork, gaining in strength and support, and invasive intentions against neighboring territories flourish—as if we need more border guards and customs officers. More and more voices, sinister and ominous, are heard demanding ethnic purity for this or that state. And we all know how such ethnic purity can be accomplished: we know that ethnic cleansing means genocide.

Yet European states cannot be expected to open their territory without restrictions

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to anyone who wishes to settle there. True, migrations and ethnic intermixing have been going on since the beginnings of time, but in our day at least three new circumstances have changed the situation. First, migrations used to take centuries, but today we can jet from one end of the world to another with lightning speed. Second, immigrants avail themselves of the services of the welfare state in the country to which they have come, and once they are here we cannot let them starve, but no country has unlimited resources. Finally, there is the purely demographic question of population density. It is true that ethnic diversity is a source of cultural richness. But it is also, inevitably, a source of conflict.

The question of national identity is endlessly complex. Given the extent to which progress towards unification has been accompanied by a rise in separatist and xenophobic tendencies, it is too soon to talk about the end of the nation state. And modern attempts—made by Napoleon, by Hitler, by Moscow—to unify Europe by force have made the various peoples of the continent wary. But assuming that national identities will persist, can a European identity be built alongside them or over them? Is there such an identity, and if not, is it desirable? Is there, or can there be, such a thing as European patriotism?

The greatest achievement of European unification will certainly be a lasting peace. But the possibility of achieving such a peace depends on a number of conditions, not just on the presence of a bureaucracy in Brussels; it depends on cultural conditions as well as military and economic ones. It is often said that the First World War, because it left behind it so many unfulfilled aspirations and unsatisfied demands, so much bitterness and resentment, made the Second World War inevitable. If so, the twenty inter-war years were just a brief interlude between two cataclysms. But this inevitability is doubtful. The Second World War also left many demands unfulfilled, much bitterness and simmering resentment: the Soviet annexations in Central and Eastern Europe, the loss of independence by so many nations, the slipping and pruning of Germany, the clipping and pruning of Poland, a variety of national grievances. But there has been no Third World War. So far.

Can there be one? It would be rash to assume that a Third World War is impossible in principle. It seems unlikely that any one of the myriad resentments and territorial grievances could be enough by itself to set off the mechanism of European self-destruction, but can we be sure? A look at the map suffices: Northern Ireland, Catalonia, Corsica, the Basques, Wales . . . Bosnia (again). The Hungarians in Slovakia; the Hungarians in Romania. The Russians in the Ukraine. The Flemish and the Walloons. I once asked an acquaintance of mine in Brussels whether there actually were any Belgians, or just Flemish and Walloons. He said: Well, there's always a handful of Polish Jews, and they're neither Flemish nor Walloons, so I suppose they must be Belgians.

The desire to separate oneself off—or, conversely, to unify on ethnic principles—is an expression of anxiety or unease, sometimes even of desperation; it comes from a need for tribal self-confirmation in the face of a Europe on its way to becoming a federal state even though there is no rational reason for fear. Moreover, nationalism, chauvinism, and xenophobia are simple instincts, easy to mold into a primitive ideology that is everywhere the same but everywhere hostile to all others.

The European idea may have a historical foundation, but it is not easy to generalize. Strictly speaking, if "Europe" is a geographical category, it clearly cannot serve as the basis of an idea. If, on the other hand, we define it culturally, we must have the definition before we can say what Europe in fact consists of. If, for instance, we define Europe according to the geographical limits of Western Christianity, we must exclude Russia, Serbia, Romania, Albania, Greece, and Bosnia, but include North and South America. And we must show that such a definition would not be arbitrary.

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Of course European culture has its ancient roots: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. But it is hard to define the limits within which those roots were continuously alive or are still alive today. Why, after all, should we consider Judaism, within which Christianity was born, as something European, when it belonged to Europe neither geographically nor linguistically and was incorporated into Christian culture as a result of a set of exceptional historical circumstances?

And would anyone dare claim that the Jews, who never accepted Christianity but who influenced the history of European culture to such an extraordinary degree, are not part of that culture? Are we to say that nothing that is not Christian is not part of that culture? On such an interpretation, we exclude from European culture large swathes of the Enlightenment, of socialist movements and liberal movements, and of freemasonry; we exclude Spinoza and Hobbes, Voltaire and Kant, Diderot and Sartre, and dozens of great writers and thinkers who were either indifferent or hostile to Christianity, or who were condemned by the Church. One might try arguing that they were all Christian in the depths of their hearts, unbeknownst to themselves, but that would have to be proved.

The Church of Rome is cosmopolitan by virtue of the nature of its mission, and the Pope has good reason for stressing, as he does on occasion, the need for a spiritual underpinning to the movement which is to unify Europe. Nevertheless, we must also say clearly how and where the cultural limits of what is European are to be established.

What would it mean, in any case, to say that Europe should be Christian? Christianity, after all, still exists, though it is much weakened—and it is not persecuted in Europe. So to say that Europe should be Christian can only mean one of two things: *either* that Christianity should be imposed by force—in other words, by law: that Europe should be run on theocratic principles, and that Christianity (or rather, strictly speaking, not Christianity but Roman Catholicism) should become the official and obligatory state ideology—which is surely unfeasible, thank God; *or* that we must evangelize and convert pagans, by persuasion rather than force. This latter is, of course, perfectly acceptable; it is the task of priests, and also of lay missionaries. And only their efforts and good example, not threats of force or laws and decrees, will decide the outcome. Party declarations would be a waste of paper; they would have no effect. So yes, go ahead and preach the Christian message in the spirit of peace; and if you are not happy with the results, blame yourselves, not the devil.

Besides, it is hard to see how the cosmopolitanism of the Church could be reconciled with a self-satisfied wallowing in the mud of primitive nationalism or with the (anti-Christian) opinion that nations are natural enemies to each other. Having said that, I believe that there is such a thing as European culture, and that Christianity is part of its central core. Not in the absurd sense that every particular European is a Christian or that those who are not Christians are not part of European culture, but in the sense that the Christian faith, in spite of all the atrocities, the persecution, and the violence that accompanied its spread and preservation, was the carrier of the great intellectual, moral, and artistic achievements of our continent, and that it deserves our homage even in cases where those whose efforts were rooted in it or originally inspired by it broke free from their source.

About twenty years ago I wrote an essay in which I defended the idea of Eurocentrism and remarked on certain peculiarities of the European spirit, in particular on its ability to break out of its own closed perspective and view itself through the eyes of others (an ability especially characteristic of the literature of the Enlightenment), self-critically, from a distance—in other words, to reject any final, rigidly fixed, and permanent self-identification. European civilization managed, despite strong resistance, to liberate and infuse into the world the spirit of toleration, to recognize diversity as a value in life,

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and to stimulate invention and inquiry, and with it the habit of skepticism and distrust. And Christianity proved its fecundity in that culture not least by finding the path which allowed it to avoid succumbing to two temptations at opposite extremes: Manichaean or gnostic contempt for matter on the one hand, and pantheistic indifference to the overwhelming presence of evil. Thanks to this, matter—the body and the physical world—was not perceived as the work of the devil, which must be shunned, nor as the incarnation of divinity, which we must simply adore, but as an enemy which can be subdued. This was the spiritual underpinning of Europe's conquest of nature.

Thus when we speak of European civilization, we have in mind not territorial criteria, which are impossible to establish, but rather Europe's spiritual constitution. How is this constitution bearing up in the process of unification? Fairly feebly. Admittedly, the European Union requires all its member states to fulfill certain specific conditions: to guarantee civic freedoms and the good functioning of democratic institutions. This is quite a lot, but it may not be enough.

There are also, of course, economic criteria. Cultural criteria are too elusive to be expressed as clear requirements and implemented in practice. And the question to answer is not whether such-and-such country does or does not have the *right* to seek membership in the Union, but whether it can contribute to preserving and cultivating that spiritual constitution which is the foundation of our culture: to keeping it vital and flourishing.

Can we do this? Surely not by strutting around boasting about our illustrious ancestors in Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem. Besides, who exactly, one wonders, are these ancestors supposed to be? Socrates, or those who sentenced him to death for godlessness? The great Roman emperors, like Augustus or Marcus Aurelius, or Caligula, Nero, and Tiberius (at least as they are presented by Suetonius)? The great and venerable Fathers and saints of the Church, or rather those popes who sent out crusades, massacred Cathars, and organized ballets of courtesans at the Vatican?

The history of Europe had its admirable episodes and its moments of glory, but they were only moments. It was European civilization that created the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century: Nazism, communism, fascism. These were not the crazed fantasies of a few fanatics but bold, powerful, and well-organized mass movements with a strong ideological base. Communism was the degenerate bastard-child of the Enlightenment, Nazism the degenerate bastard-child of Romanticism. Our heritage abounds equally in masterpieces, great monuments to the spirit, and in monstrous crimes. The first were mostly the work of individuals of genius, the second of mass upheavals.

If we want Europe to be more than just a place of imposing temples to Mammon—insurance companies, stock exchanges, banks; more than a place where, in comparison to Asia, Africa, and South America, the standard of living is high; more, even, than a place that guarantees freedom of speech and the rule of law, those marvellous inventions without which life is unbearable; if we also want our riches to bear fruit, to bring forth art that will delight and uplift us, to alleviate poverty and to help those in need; and if we want freedom of speech, which by nature must also give rise to falsehood, baseness, and evil, to produce ideas that are enlightening, uplifting, and amusing—if we want all this, what can we do to further it?

It is no use artificially cooking up a "European" ideology or philosophy. If we want an ideology, a religion, or an official philosophy, we must construct a tyranny —in radical contradiction to the spiritual constitution of Europe, with its stubborn (though so often threatened and attacked) affirmation of freedom. Otherwise we can only have what we have now: a variety of conflicting ideologies, religions, and philosophies, and constant uncertainty about what they could lead to: whether and how one of them, even the most innocent-

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looking, might spark off a destructive explosion. The German-American historian Holborn has suggested that the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union could be seen as a conflict between right-wing Hegelianism and left-wing Hegelianism—dubious homage to philosophy and the power of ideas.

Nor can we hope artificially to create a European patriotism (a phenomenon that has never really existed) which would coexist in blissful harmony with local and tribal patriotisms—for these must not be destroyed, denigrated, or attacked. There is something, however, we can do.

Europe as a distinct cultural phenomenon began to emerge in the sixteenth century, partly in response to the Turkish threat. Erasmus, that wanderer without a tribe, was a European *par excellence*: he wanted to be, and was, a citizen of the world, like the ancient Stoics. It was his century that saw the emergence of the spiritual territory which proudly called itself the Republic of Letters—Res Publica Litterarum: that circle of scholars, lovers of ancient literature, who knew each other and corresponded with each other, and wrote in classical, not scholastic, Latin. It was a small group, but an extraordinarily important one; they formed Europe's intellectual elite. And they were conscious of belonging to something that was supra-national, wherever they happened to live. This Republic lived on through the seventeenth century, but later died, as if somehow paralyzed by the creation of modern nations.

Is there anything like it today, with our modern ease of movement and communication? Not really. Of course those of us who toil in the world of academia have all been to countless conferences, congresses, and colloquia, in countless countries and cities; we know hundreds of academic colleagues throughout the globe; we have travelled and published in international journals. And yet, in spite of all this, there is not really anything that deserves the name of a humanist republic.

Why not? Perhaps because that old Republic had certain well-defined cultural tasks to perform: to reform religion and the Church in the spirit of the traditional virtues, to combat prejudice, superstition, and fanaticism, and to do all this by appealing to ancient ideals of wisdom and beauty. Perhaps it was to this—its specific cultural role—that it owed its existence. We, too, have our equivalent of Latin: English. But it is a poor substitute, and we do not love it. We do not really love any language, including our own mother tongues. The scholars of that old Republic loved the ancient languages; for us, English is merely a means of communication.

In Erasmus's time great literature in national languages already existed or was emerging: Dante, then Montaigne, the Pléiades, Kochanowski, Cervantes, and other great masters of the pen. Latin was no longer essential for expressing wisdom and beauty. And yet Latin not only continued to exist, but thrived. And with it thrived the belief that the cultivation of the liberal arts was an end in itself—a great and noble end, even though only a few could pursue it.

It might seem strange that there was once a common language used by the educated classes in Europe which then gradually died out, and a consciousness of being a citizen of Europe, a *civis mundi*, which died out with it. Will the same fate befall English? We do not know. But linguists say that languages inevitably change and split up into dialects, which grow apart, so that after a while the dialects and regional forms of the same language are no longer mutually comprehensible, and then no longer even recognizable as such.

The advantages of English are obvious. It is hardly surprising that a Norwegian or Hungarian scientist prefers to make his work known to an international audience of scholars rather than limiting it to a handful of speakers of his exotic (to us) mother tongue. And how, if not in English, are the Japanese to communicate with the Tanzanians? But there are disadvantages, too. Our growing tendency to use English as the

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international language inevitably impoverishes other languages, in which it is now sometimes hard to express certain things except through neologisms from English.

The languages of the great ancient non-European cultures are also threatened. I'm told that at universities in Arab countries, the Koran and theology are taught in Arabic, but physics and chemistry in English or in French. A professor of history from Delhi told me that in India, too, only first-year students are taught history in Hindi; later it is taught in English. We are losing diversity—the cultural richness of the world.

We do not know whether the unification of Europe will succeed; we cannot be sure that the wars and the slaughter we have recently seen, and continue to see, in the former Yugoslavia cannot be repeated in other parts of Europe. Nor can we entirely exclude the possibility that new imperialisms will emerge (or old ones reemerge), with new dreams of subjection and conquest. The European consciousness, or European patriotism, is stagnant and feeble, often powerless in the face of local interests. Nevertheless, a united Europe, though not yet a superstate, is in the interests of all its members and does not pose a threat to their ethnic identities, insofar as those identities are important to them.

And there are (non-bureaucratic) things we can do to support Europe as a cultural realm. We can return to the idea of education not as a way of developing professional skills, but as a way of inculcating the (essential) ability to communicate in a friendly way above and beyond national and financial interests, on the basis of a great common tradition. We need schools that will teach Latin and Greek, schools that will allow us to rediscover the joy of immersing ourselves in our common cultural past. We need to teach history with the aim of getting young people to understand who they are—who they themselves are as the heirs to a past both glorious and disgraceful.

If we lose our history, the sense of our past as something that belongs to us, is a part of us, and together with it the ability to answer the question "Who are we?," we shall also lose the ability to discern a non-utilitarian meaning to life, to find non-utilitarian justifications for what we do; and without this ability we will be faced with spiritual emptiness and chaos. It is heartening to hear that in some Central and East European countries, but also in the United States, new centers for the liberal arts are springing up, preserving and promoting the spirit of the European cultural community. For *this* is a form of support for Europe: this traditional, disinterested teaching and inquiry—disinterested in the sense that it is concerned with the acquisition and passing on of knowledge for its own sake, not with a view to developing specific professional skills. It is enormously important and beneficial, for it allows us to rediscover the still living and breathing, but now hidden, overgrown and largely forgotten, foundation on which Europe rests.

Human interests conflict by nature, not by accident. In this sense war, pillage, and persecution are natural. The market by itself does not create human solidarity; it encourages us to look after our own private interests. But the advantages of the market economy over the planned one are so obvious and well-proven that they cannot be rationally denied. And sometimes—as the eighteenth century already knew—private vices can become public virtues, and the private interests of each can end up working for the good of all. They can, but they need not—especially when we are faced with so many public issues which demand huge resources and which the market cannot settle by itself. Ethnic solidarity very often turns out to be hatred towards other tribes, but it need not be so. The European community, if it is possible at all, does not require hatred of other continents. And a European community *is* possible; but the market itself cannot create it. We should not rely on the benevolence of the market when things get dangerous. And things sometimes get dangerous quite suddenly, by accident. Culture also means taming fate; and fate is neither benevolent nor guided by compassion.

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Up from communism

by Anthony Daniels

My father was a communist. As is often the case, what attracted the father repelled the son. Of course, I don't mean to imply that my anticommunism was merely the consequence of a conflict of generations: I read a fair bit and went to see for myself. The latter was something my father never did: reality didn't interest him. Indeed, he resigned as a member of the British Board of Trade's Anglo-Soviet committee when it became clear that, at some point, he would actually have to go to the Soviet Union, rather than merely pontificate about it. But the generational conflict gave the whole question of communism a personal edge that perhaps it didn't have for others of my age and situation.

I remember the day my mother threw out the Little Stalin Library (I wish now that she hadn't). My father was by then, if not less firm in the faith, at least less vociferous in it. The Little Lenin Library went out too, more for reasons of space, I think, than for ideological ones. Nevertheless, quite a lot of literature—communist, Marxist, and merely Progressive (at least, progressive in its day)—was left behind.

Among it, of course, was the *History of the Civil War in the USSR*, edited by Gorky, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kirov, Zhdanov, and Stalin (the names of Gorky and Kirov appearing in black boxes to indicate that they were now dead, though naturally with no indication given as to the causes of their deaths). The maroon-brown cover, the front board with a bas-relief of a revolutionary scene, conferred a quasi-religious feel to the book: which was, of course, entirely appropriate. I am not sure whether my father had actually ever read it; I strongly suspect it was for him more an icon than a work of reference.

Then there was G. V. Plekhanov's *Materialist Conception of History*, and the first English edition of V. I. Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, published in 1927, which—astonishing as it now seems to me—I once read from cover to cover. (It was, of course, compulsory reading—and regurgitation—for generations of Soviet students, the sine qua non of graduation in anything from Egyptology to entomology.) I had not previously suspected that such bile and rancor could be introduced into books on subject matter so abstruse and recherché. Here was a mind for which no disagreement was possible without the hurling of insults and the expression of murderous hatred: on a single page taken at random, we learn that other writers were "pygmies and miserable scribblers" and Ernst Mach, the great German physicist and philosopher, was responsible for a "pestilence." On the page opposite is displayed, in all its bilious glory, the theocratic cast of mind that led Lenin to establish the first modern totalitarian state:

A subtle and continual falsification of Marx-

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> ism, a crafty and constant dissemination of anti-materialist doctrines disguised in a Marxian garb—this is how modern revisionism must be characterized—in the field of political economy, in questions of tactics and in philosophy as a whole, in both its epistemological and sociological aspects.

For Lenin, there were but doctrines, only one of which was true: his. All others were heresy, the work of the devil, and philosophy and philosophers were to be dragooned by the imperative mood followed swiftly by the bullet. Disagreement was enmity, and the death of enemies the only solution to that enmity. If ever a literary style were the man himself, Lenin's was Lenin: you could deduce his bloodthirstiness from the quality of his prose.

Growing up in a country that appeared—no, was—as peaceful as it was possible for a country with a large population to be, I was surprised by the venom that I found in my father's books. It seemed to come from another country altogether, like a message in a bottle from over the ocean. For example, there was a memorial volume to a man called John Cornford, the son of the classicist F. M. Cornford, a communist student at Cambridge who was killed on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War after only four months as an international volunteer. The book, part anthology of his writings, part recollections by others of his life, was dedicated, without irony, to "All Advanced and Progressive Mankind"—a category to which I have never really belonged, being myself thoroughly Backward and Retrogressive. Cornford was an aspiring poet, and the poem he wrote at the age of twenty-one in Spain to his girlfriend, very shortly before he was killed, has the power to move because we now know of the futility of his sacrifice:

> On the last mile to Huesca,
> The last fence for our pride,
> Think so kindly, dear, that I
> Sense you at my side.
>
> And if bad luck should lay my strength
> Into the shallow grave,
> Remember all the good you can;
> Don't forget my love.

But it was not for his tenderness that all advanced and progressive mankind memorialized him: on the contrary. It was for his precocious and uncompromising (if still only theoretical) crudity, brutality, and bloodthirstiness in the cause that he was admired. A poem written in Cambridge about literary modernism, "Keep Culture Out of Cambridge," ends with the lines:

> There's none of these fashions have come to stay,
> And there's nobody here got time to play.
> All we've brought are our party cards
> Which are no bloody good for your bloody charades.

A bit of swearing conferred upon you honorary membership of the proletariat. And his short poem about the assassination of Sergei Kirov in Leningrad in 1934, starts with the stanza:

> Nothing is ever certain, nothing is ever safe,
> To-day is overturning yesterday's settled good.
> Everything dying keeps a hungry grip on life.
> Nothing is ever born without screaming and blood.

The poem ends with the unconsciously humorous (and grimly prophetic):

> He will throw a longer shadow as time recedes.

In his recollection of Cornford at Cambridge, Victor Kiernan relates the following about him:

> For him . . . the Revolution was as unquestionable a certainty as the Resurrection to a Christian. He visualised the bourgeoisie . . . as shaking in their shoes (he used a coarser metaphor). His animal vitality compared with equally real reflectiveness made one take seriously things he said which would have

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> sounded artificial in most other mouths, and one never thought of his age except with incredulity. I recall his telling, with genuine relish, a story of Bela Kun machine-gunning five thousand prisoners in a forced retreat in the Russian Civil War: he told it not in a spirit of sadism, but of appreciation of an act of political necessity firmly carried out.

In other words, you can't make an omelette without mass murder: a philosophy of real depth and charm. No wonder he was widely admired.

Then there was Mayakovsky, in translation of course. It came in a dull brown paper cover, in a series entitled *Life and Literature in the Soviet Union*. Printed and published in Britain in 1940, on the tenth anniversary of his death, at a time when the Soviet Union was still allied to a Nazi Germany that was then at war with Britain, it alluded to his suicide, an archetypical act of "petit bourgeois pessimism" (as a Marxist friend of mine at medical school once characterized Schubert lieder). How did it come about, asked the introductory essay, that "a grown and socially developed personality" should have committed "so indefensible an act"?

The answer was clear: it was the criticisms of the RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, that drove him to it. "The dominating clique of RAPP, the most influential literary society (since dissolved), was later revealed as a group of Trotskyites . . . associated with the counter-revolutionary network. . . . Mayakovsky was indirectly the victim of the same hands that later directly slew the great Soviet writer of the generation preceding him, Gorky."

Indeed he was, though perhaps not quite in the sense that the author meant. The reasons for Mayakovsky's suicide have never been fully elucidated, but the latest theory is that he had been refused a passport to leave the Soviet Union for a visit to Paris, the first time in his career under the Soviets as the golden bard of their Revolution that he had ever been thus refused: and knowing only too well what this refusal presaged (he preferred the companionship of NKVD men to more conventional literary types, and thus appreciated the meaning of slippery slopes and careers in decline), he chose the bullet rather than disgrace or something worse. If this is true, it is certainly ironic, for one of his most famous poems was a hymn of praise to "My Soviet Passport," written only the year before:

> I'd tear
> like a wolf
> at bureaucracy . . .
> But this . . .
> I pull out
> of my wide-trouser pockets
> duplicate
> of a priceless cargo.
> You now:
> read this
> and envy,
> I'm a citizen
> of the Soviet Socialist Union!

A Russian speaker tells me that Mayakovsky's mastery of Russian rhyme is impressive, but in English translation his work seems hardly poetry at all: rather, it consists of violent declamatory slogans, that belong more to the history of propaganda than of literature. There is a glorification of violence, with fights, guns, conflicts, and hatred appearing in every verse if not in every line. For example, there is a poem called "To Comrade Nette: Man and Ship." Comrade Nette was a Latvian communist who was a diplomatic courier, killed while defending some papers that counter-revolutionaries were attempting to steal from him. A ship was named after him.

> Cutting space in half
> as it [the ship] sets
> Trailing tracks of heroes
> for ever in its wake,
> bright and bloody
> from corridor combats . . .
> We march on,
> through revolver barks,
> that

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dying,
we shall be embodied
in ships,
in poems,
and other long-lived works.

When I was young, I was bemused by this when I read it: it didn't seem like poetry at all, though it was alleged to be poetry, and it gave me a feeling of deep unease whose precise source, having insufficient historical knowledge, I could not specify. Now the sheer unfeeling brutality of the sentiment appalls me, which no verbal felicity in the original (which in any case I am unqualified to judge) could redeem.

I had a favorite, though, among my father's progressive books: the *Soviet Calendar for 1947*, to mark the thirtieth year of the Soviet state, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House. I spent many happy hours with it, and knew its contents more or less by heart. It was a huge book, cream-covered, with the arms of the Soviet Union embossed on the front cover. Inside, on the half-title page, was a medallion portrait of Lenin and Stalin together, both of them looking with iron determination slightly upwards, their eyes mildly screwed, into the far distance not only spatially but temporally.

The contents of the Calendar were a delight. I learned to recognize from it Soviet-style photography, brown and always slightly fuzzy round the edges, as if to make it easier at some future date to remove a personage or two (it always being so difficult in Soviet circumstances to predict the past). Every Soviet republic had its day, with an accompanying picture of happy smiling young farm workers carrying baskets groaning with peaches or grapes. Celebrated Soviet figures—heroes of aviation or arctic exploration—were extolled; one of my favorite pages was that with a picture of the Victory vase pasted in, a present to the Generalissimo from the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory on the occasion of the first anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War. Nine feet tall, this vase had a huge portrait of Stalin surrounded by gold laurels on it, with medallions of scenes from the battle of Stalingrad underneath, and words from one of Stalin's speeches on its pediment, engraved in gold. O Victory vase, where art thou now?

Of course, the content of the Calendar was strictly orthodox. This involved the backward projection of proto-Marxist-Leninist ideas on to Russian heroes of the past, political, scientific, and literary—of whom Dostoyevsky was conspicuous by his absence. Chekhov would have been delighted by Stalin's Russia: for he had never thought that his deep conviction that "the absurd and uncouth country would become a blossoming garden" would be justified so soon. Because of his distance from the revolutionary struggle, he thought it would take 200 to 300 years. He would joyfully have joined in the applause at the end of Stalin's speech, on February 9, 1946, accepting nomination as a candidate for election to the Supreme Soviet, recorded thus—in italics—in the Calendar:

> *(All rise. Loud and prolonged applause rising to an ovation. Voices in different parts of the hall "Long live great Stalin, Hurrah!" "Cheers for the great leader of the peoples!" "Glory to great Stalin!" "Long live Comrade Stalin, the candidate of the entire people!" "Glory to the creator of all our victories, Comrade Stalin!")*

It was some years later that I encountered in person the long-term consequences of those victories. I quickly learned a vitally important lesson for guests of Soviet hotels: if you didn't want to go hungry, you ate food when and wherever you saw it, and argued over whose it was afterwards. As the Yugoslav partisans used to say during the war, once you've eaten, they can't take it away from you.

Of all my experiences in the socialist third of the world, perhaps the most illuminating—in the sense of a flash of lightning on a jet-black night—occurred in North Korea. I was walking across a deserted space in

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Pyongyang—all spaces in Pyongyang were deserted when they were not full of officially organized parades—when I was approached furtively by a young North Korean, the only one who ever spoke to me spontaneously, in his own words. It was clear from his demeanor that he was doing something very dangerous.

"Do you speak English?" he asked me.

"Yes," I replied.

"I am a student at the Institute of Foreign Languages. Reading Shakespeare and Dickens is the greatest, the only, joy of my life."

We parted soon afterwards: or rather, we glided past each other, having spoken a few words as we went. But what he said resonated in my mind long afterwards.

It was, of course, deeply impressive that someone in so distant and hermetically sealed a kingdom should speak such perfect English: but the teaching of foreign languages, needless to say always for the worst of purposes, was something that communist states always did very well, at least for the very few selected to benefit from the military methods by which they were inculcated.

Here, however, was an instance in which the medium was most definitely not the message. What this student conveyed, with the most brilliant concision, was the agony of living under totalitarianism, even for those who were not consigned to the camps or made to suffer the grosser material deprivations. For in North Korea—*plus staliniste que Staline*—no one spoke in his own words. Political speeches were literally inescapable: they were relayed over public address systems night and day, and had been for nearly half a century. Not only was everyone prohibited from uttering anything that he knew to be true, but he was obliged to say, or rather endlessly intone, what he knew not to be true. Moreover, he was not permitted even to lie in his own words, but only in the formulae laid down by the power. Language became not a means of communication, but of subjugation and submission.

No doubt the novels of Dickens were taught at the Institute of Foreign Languages not merely for linguistic instruction, but for their ideologically convenient depiction of poverty in capitalist England. The student, however, drew quite another lesson from the one intended: that a society existed in which language was used, even by the poor, the powerless, and the degraded, to express their own thoughts, opinions, and feelings. This was his joyful discovery after a lifetime of ruthless mental torture: and his words were neither histrionic not hyperbolic. For someone with the most minimal imagination, they were deeply revealing.

When communism collapsed in Europe, I was both pleased and surprised. Where politics are concerned, I have the gift of prophecy in reverse: what I say will happen doesn't happen, and what I say will not happen does happen. So, like many others, I thought that communism was a kind of diamond, that is to say forever. It didn't matter that I had read Andrei Amalrik's *Will the Soviet Union Last Until 1984?*, published in 1970: I thought the author was mad, in the non-clinical sense.

Hence I never gave much thought to what would happen after communism. I don't think many people did. When Ceausescu was overthrown and then summarily executed with his wife, I am now ashamed to say that I exulted. A cousin of mine, whose judgment I do not usually respect, and who was always sympathetic towards communism though not to any actual worker who happened to be performing (always inadequately) a task at her command, maintained that so perfunctory an execution was wrong, and now I agree with her. My hatred for what the Ceausescus had done, which I had seen for myself, blinded me; but there were three warnings I failed to heed. The first was a cynical old Romanian proverb: a change of rulers is the joy of fools. The second was what an eminent Romanian historian told me, that the damage done by communism would take at least three generations to undo, because everyone had been so deeply

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compromised and deformed by it. And lastly were the words of Macbeth, after he has killed the two men sleeping outside Duncan's bedchamber, pretending to believe that they were Duncan's murderers. Macbeth explains himself thus:

> Who can be wise, amazed, temp'rate, and furious,
> Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.
> Th'expedition of my violent love
> Outran the pauser, reason.

This passage is so apposite because the overthrow of Ceausescu appears, in retrospect, to have been more coup d'état than popular uprising, which the apparent spontaneity of the execution was designed to hide. And subsequent events in much of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence came to give a special meaning to Strom Thurmond's response to being told that Eisenhower was not a communist, but an anti-communist: I don't care what kind of communist he is. Apparatchiks, ideologues, and members of the nomenklatura became overnight firm believers in the virtues of democracy and free enterprise. I should have suspected that the communists were more flexible (or rather adaptable) than I had previously thought when I was in Lithuania. I happened to be in the Baltic states during their great national reawakenings, when apparently spontaneous mass movements suddenly organized themselves and flourished. At a mass meeting of Sajudis, the Lithuanian movement, a speaker called for the restoration of wayside shrines throughout the country, and the tombstone-faced Lithuanian Communist Party secretary-general, who also happened to be present, applauded like everyone else, as if the restoration of wayside shrines had always been a principal plank of the Communist Party's platform. Perhaps it should have occurred to me that there was more to the implosion of communism than met the eye, and that the path ahead would be crooked rather than straight, but it didn't.

I visited what used to be called the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic shortly after the changes, and gave an impromptu speech at a dinner, in which I drew attention to the craven attitude of western intellectuals throughout the Soviet era, for example by frequently following the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (subscribers to which in the good old days were asked by the publishers to tear out pages and paste in new ones, according to the most recent changes in ideological history, and woe betide Soviet subscribers who did not comply!) in maintaining that Moldavian was a different language from Romanian. Everyone was moved by my confession of western turpitude. But how bright the future looked, now that the yoke was lifted!

I returned a few years later. Reformed Moldavia was a disaster. The Russian market was defunct and Europeans refused to allow Moldavian agricultural products in, for fear of upsetting their own producers. Incomes, never high, had declined by 40 percent. Nothing worked, decay was accelerating, there were regular power cuts in winter, tuberculosis was of epidemic proportions. The country's largest export was of prostitutes to Western Europe (I saw them in Amsterdam) and the Middle East. It was said that a quarter of the population had fled.

In other parts of the former Soviet Union, things were no better. The gray ferro-concrete Soviet mess still ruined millions of square miles of landscape. In Georgia, the much-feted Eduard Shevarnadze ran a thuggish authoritarian state, whose salient characteristics somehow evaded most western commentators. It was as if they had fellow-travelled for so long that they could not give up the habit, even when the nature of the regime changed, and it had dropped its millenarian ideological pretensions to become merely criminal.

Of course, some countries managed the transition better than others. And the one indisputable gain everywhere was the abandonment of an official, universalist ideology, with a consequent increase in freedom of expression. Even in those places where

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people were still not completely free to say what they believed, nowhere were they required any longer to say what they did not believe. For people who had been afraid to be the first to stop applauding Ceausescu, because it was to risk the charge of disaffection, this represented immediate relief from prolonged mental agony.

Even if old communists often remained in control, therefore, and the nomenklatura corruptly transferred nationalized assets to themselves, and even if the new dispensation was authoritarian in nature, and living standards fell rather than rose, the official lying that continued (as often emanating from the western agencies that supposedly monitored developments in these countries as from native sources) was piecemeal, a part of the repertoire of normal political behavior, rather than derived from one large central ideological lie. The one great freedom achieved everywhere, and it was not a minor one in the circumstances, was freedom from slogans.

One might have hoped that the inglorious demise of a millenarian ideology such as communism would have been accompanied by a reduction in the attractions of all ideological ways of thinking, in the victorious west as in the defeated east. By ideology I mean the single political lens through which the whole of life is obsessionally viewed, judged, and conceived. But the reverse seems to have happened, in the west at least: with the demise of the Soviet Union, the influence of ideology on daily life here seems to have increased rather than diminished. This is not to say that there is one centrally-promoted or monolithic ideology: rather, ideology has been privatized (perhaps balkanized would be a better way of putting it). People now select an ideology according to their taste and personal predicament, often using it as a means of procuring personal advancement. In large part, they succeed. Anti-racism, feminism, varieties of sexual 'liberation,' 'green' activism, and several other ideologies, now shape not only our institutions, but even the way we speak.

In the days of the Cold War, a large proportion of those who were ideologically inclined—those who wanted a single political explanation of everything, especially of their own dissatisfactions and disappointments—espoused, or expressed sympathy for, a variety of Marxism. A Marxist future still looked possible: even if the 'deformations' of the Soviet Union were admitted, at least the Leninist state helped to bring about revolutions in Third World countries upon which the ideologically inclined could then project their fantasies, at least for the time being, until the next, new and improved revolution came along. But since Marxism was the ideology of states self-evidently hostile to the western democracies that still enjoyed the loyalty of the majority of their populations, the practical inroads of Marxism into daily life in the democracies were limited.

It was not, of course, the crimes committed in the names of Marxism that destroyed the credibility of the Marxist ideology: these had been evident from the outset and had been swallowed whole, almost without indigestion, by the ideologically inclined intelligentsia. Indeed, it seems to me likely that the scale of these crimes actually increased the attraction of Marxist regimes; for surely, only people involved in a grand and ultimately humane project would have the confidence to act with such ruthless inhumanity? It was the collapse of the regimes that espoused Marxism, the sheer practical impossibility of their continuing along the same or similar lines, that discredited full-blown Marxist-Leninist prescriptions. These prescriptions, be it remembered, were still popular among intellectuals into the late 1980s: revolutionary movements in the Third World, in areas such as Central America (as I saw for myself), were sure of support, both moral and financial, if only they promised to expropriate landowners and impoverish the national bourgeoisie, as if this pathway to universal bliss had been tried nowhere else before.

The chief attraction of ideology as a way

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of thinking about the world is that, in the absence of religious belief, it answers man's need for a purpose that transcends the humdrum tasks and flux of day-to-day existence in a settled democratic society. In doing so, it reassures the individual of his personal significance even as he frets about his insignificance. Of course, in the process it obliterates the distinction between the inherent limitations and travails of human life, for which religion used to provide both an explanation and a consolation, and the genuinely political sphere. On the contrary, it recognizes no inherent limitations to human life at all, which is why it has a tendency, in the words of Alice, to grow furiouser and furiouser, even as some of its ostensible ends are met. As equality of the sexes comes about, therefore, so feminists grow shriller: for the disparity between what is expected of social and political change, and what it actually produces in the way of personal satisfaction, is laid all too bare. The increased shrillness is a sign of existential desperation.

The demise both of the Marxist enemy and the attraction of the Marxist-Leninist panacea did not reduce the attraction and convenience to modern intellectuals of ideological thought as a genre (without ideology, what were the vast number of tertiary educated intellectuals actually to do?), but it did weaken the resistance to it. Anti-communism was not an ideology—it was merely an anti-ideology—but it drew a great deal of strength from the self-evidently formidable nature of the foe, and thus came to appear almost an ideology in itself. But the anti-ideologist now has to fight on a hundred fronts at once; it is more like a guerrilla than a conventional war. And since, almost by definition, the anti-ideologist is not as obsessed with any given subject as his many opponents are, who each derive the meaning of their lives from their ideologised grievances, he is at a permanent disadvantage. In the absence of a strong communist enemy, ideology makes inroads in our society as easily as a hot knife through butter.

Sometimes I even find myself lamenting the lifting of the Iron Curtain, seized by a nostalgia for the days when, for example, in preparation for a trip to Romania, I would memorize the names and addresses of dissidents on the way to the airport in the London underground, or write them down in a hastily devised code. I sometimes long for the yellowing gloom of communist lighting, the abominable food and surly service, the silence at night, the concrete-cold hotels with their prostitutes and leather-coated secret servicemen in the lobbies, the crumbling buildings, the pervasive kerosene and cabbage smell, the absence of anything to buy and complete lack of choice, the museums of the Revolution and of Religion and Atheism, the news bulletins reporting the latest riots in America and the local turnip harvest (always record-breaking), the short but intense friendships and conversations, the feeling that I was being followed and spied upon, of those times: the sense that I came from and was an emissary of a better world. I had to go behind the Iron Curtain to learn gratitude for what I had. Of course, I do not suggest that the thrill and joys of political tourism could or should weigh in the balance against the agonies of living under communism, but I should not be telling the truth if I did not admit that I came to love what I hated.

In the days when communism was still expansionist, I had seen the future and it was evil. I wanted to fight the good fight. Now the future interests me less than the past. Its evils are more diffuse, less tangible, harder to oppose. It is time for me to cultivate my garden, just as—in the end—my father, the communist, did.

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New poems
by Sarah Ruden

A fortieth birthday poem to myself

What a long way my children have to go
To come from me. About them, all I know

Is that odd journey. Through a crowding wind
They bike to church. They queue for an exam.

They lurch on bumping airline aisles. They pace
Museums, tap the car to work, and race

To elevators. I have not been kind.
From a great distance I have called behind.

Children are weak and naked—so I hear—
Yet these exacting years they must endure

And trust that they will meet me in some green
Home neither they nor I have ever seen.

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For the war dead

Rapidly, darkly, all around,
The groves and fields are falling down.

We see it from the yard today:
The land, that's endless, ebbs away.

We did not dream this could be done.
Relentlessly we loved our son.

Take him along—we look to You.
What can be finished that You do?

It lies on stone—this woods, this hill.
It is as lasting as Your will.

But neither can this be undone:
The scar, our passion for our son.

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After Ecclesiastes, Chapter 12

Nobody can be ready to go through
Clear to the time to come, no more to be
Gazed at, no more to choose. What will she do?
How terrified she is to have to see

That she was happy in the time before.
It was best to study, to be well, to marry,
It seems. But she was always sure of more—
Though not of what. Strange, to remain unwary

So long of what could happen to persuade her
That God, the very God who cannot change,
Imagined grass and china when he made her,
But kept it secret. It is far too strange.

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Theater

Gurney on a gurney

by Mark Steyn

A. R. Gurney, Jr. passed most of his career happily and successfully as an exponent of witty, WASPy dramatic amusements, a latter-day Philip Barry, if somewhat less swell-legant. Three titles give you the general layout of the territory: *The Dining Room* (1982), *The Perfect Party* (1986), *The Cocktail Hour* (1988). In the last decade, he's been undergoing a kind of mid-career crisis, which is showing alarming signs of deteriorating into an end-career crisis. It began with *Sylvia*, whose dramatis personae were the usual moneyed sophisticates but now joined by a dog—a dog played by Sarah Jessica Parker, whose big moment was a duet with her owner on "Night and Day." Hard to object to that. Many straight plays would be improved by the addition of a dog singing Cole Porter.

But then came last year's *The Fourth Wall*, in which Gurney's frustration at the right-wing degeneration of George W. Bush's America was embodied in a symbolic rupture of the genteel constraints of the Gurneyan play. Bush was such an affront to the health of the Republic that Gurney's heroine could only confront the danger by busting through the naturalistic conventions of dinner-party drama and the conventional middle-class life it embodies.

Gurney's play was certainly brilliantly symbolic, though perhaps not of what he intended. In years to come, it will serve as a very literal illustration of the way much of the liberal northeastern mindset has become unhinged by this President. Readers will have their own examples, but I will long cherish the unfailing reliability of Vermont Public Radio throughout the last year, on which whenever the host would announce a discussion of the merits of war with Iraq the first caller would immediately bring up chads, Florida, the Supreme Court decision, etc. *The Fourth Wall*, in which Gurney doesn't so much break through "the fourth wall" as bring down the temple of his art upon himself, is one of the livelier examples of this psychosis.

If I were the playwright's agent, I would be a little alarmed at the rapidity with which the successful brand of A. R. Gurney has transformed itself into A. R. on a gurney. Now we have the latest installment: *O Jerusalem*, at the Flea Theater. Mr. Gurney has decided to give us the wisdom of his insights into the Israeli-Palestinian situation. As when Bertie Wooster determines to play "Body and Soul" on his banjolele, one wishes Mr. Gurney had a trusted manservant to murmur, "I should not advise it, sir." These Middle East chappies have been going at it an awfully long time and, even if Gurney's only just got around to noticing it, most fellows with anything to say on the subject have already weighed in. Unless you've got something especially illuminating to add, it's best to steer clear.

But this is where Gurney's personal crisis comes in. The conceit of *O Jerusalem* is that the play was written after September 11, but

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then lost to the world for some years until discovered among the late author's personal effects. We are now watching it at some unspecified point in the future, in a stripped down semi-staged version with placards instead of scenery, in which, we're informed at the beginning, the cast will edit the play as it proceeds. "We make cuts and changes as we perform it," explains one of the players, "indicating these adjustments as we go along," by stepping out of character to explain to us directly what happened in the scenes they've skipped. The reason they do this is because the play is "a long, rambling and tormented piece."

So, for example, we meet the unlikely pillar of American diplomacy, Mr. Hartwell Clark (Stephen Rowe), a stereotypically ignorant Republican, Texas oilman, and old school chum of Dubya who, upon the election—whoops, "selection"—of the forty-third President, is appointed to the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. "Why do they call it that?" asks his stereotypically stupid, vulgar Republican wife. "Maybe," says Clark, "it's nearer than we think"—as we're about to discover. He knows nothing about the region and, if you think he's an unlikely choice for a sensitive posting, here's where the framing device comes in. "Here's where we've cut some clunky lines," we're told, "which remind us that at this time the Bush administration had turned its back on the Middle East. Which makes Hartwell's appointment possible, if not probable."

There is at least one set of circumstances in which this framing might be useful, and I'll come to that later. But as deployed by Gurney it becomes an evasion: for all his flamboyant insistence that he's throwing off his squaresville duds, the effect of his play-within-a-play structure is to lend distance—a wry WASPy Gurneyesque dinner-party distance—to a subject that is, after all, primal. If the point of *The Fourth Wall* was that he couldn't express his rage at Bush without tearing up the joint, you suspect that, in this instance, he tried to write something passionate about the Middle East and, aware that it didn't quite cut it, looked for a device to rationalize its failings. A cynically amused commentary on the overwrought clichés of the Palestinian question could be rather pointed in a malicious way. But Gurney saves his malice strictly for the American end of this geopolitical equation and it's not quite sharp enough to obscure the awkward fact that his characters feel thin and undernourished—it's not just that he can't do Jews and Muslims, he can't do Texans either.

For all his Republican bigotry, Hartwell Clark has an exotic past. Years ago, while on a Fulbright scholarship in Beirut, he had an affair with a Palestinian woman—indeed, a "Palestinian intellectual," as they say: judging from the number of people to whom this phrase is applied, intellectualism would appear to be the principal activity of the Palestinian people, rather as guano-extracting is to Nauru. Amira (Rita Wolf) comes up to Hartwell at a cocktail party in Jordan and demands a secret rendezvous with him. As a notorious right-wing stick man, he naturally assumes she's still hot for him and that pretty soon he'll be re-occupying her territory. If Gurney is really interested in forswearing the tired conventions of his form, he might like to do us all a favor and abandon the lazy dramatic device whereby every great epic conflict of the age can only be tested and examined within the confines of a romantic relationship. *Abie's Irish Rose* is a work of subtlety and sophistication compared to Hartwell's Arab Honey and the colossal dramatic burdens placed upon this old fling.

But Amira has more pressing matters than romance to discuss with Hartwell. She now has a son. The son is a member of Hamas. He has knowledge of an impending terrorist attack on the United States that can only be prevented by the implementation of his innovative Israeli-Palestinian peace plan. It is summer 2001. Hartwell becomes obsessed by the Hamas peace plan, tries to attract his bosses' attention, but winds up getting fired for going against administra-

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tion policy. 9/11 happens, and Hartwell Clark apparently metamorphoses into Ramsey Clark, rattling off a book promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace by blaming America, capitalism, and religion, all three of which he feels the world would be better off without.

"Terrorism is the cancer of a corrupt capitalism," Clark tells his fellow diplomat and sometime squeeze, Sally Mahoney. "Meanwhile we go on living showy, frivolous, dissolute lives. We've been diagnosed with lung cancer, but still go around sucking on cigarettes."

But Hartwell Clark's inhaling a new weed now, and he's heady with root causes. If he were Keats, this would be "On First Looking Into Chomsky's Primer":

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Darien, Connecticut? No, Hartwell has retired to New Hampshire to write his instant guide to world peace. Forget the oil business, he's strictly gas now. "I've spent most of my life pumping stuff out of the earth. I figure it's time I put something back in."

Can you believe A. R. Gurney wrote that line for real? If ever a scene needed a pooch singing "Night and Day," it's this one. But, by this stage, the framing device is slipping into the background, and the play-within-the-commentary-thereon is taking over. This is not a good move, and not just because you begin to notice all the clunks in the plot's gear changes: there are many parties who could contribute to peace in the Holy Land, but Hamas will not be one of them—they believe in the destruction of Israel, period, and that's a niche market that's working quite well for them. And, granted that Hamas may well have had a head's up on September 11, it is highly unlikely that a Christian operative, as Amira's son is, would have been privy to the secret. Once this thought occurs, you find yourself struck by the author's odd perspective: he's written a play about Palestine that all but dispenses with Jews and Muslims. No wonder it's so easy to solve: in Gurney's Holy Land, the Arabs are Christians and the most visible Jew is Sally, the U.S. diplomat who, speaking of *Abie's Irish Rose*, has a Jewish mother and an Irish father, "so I grew up trying to negotiate between cultures."

But the trouble with writing a play that hinges on a brand-new Israeli-Palestinian peace plan is that there comes a point when you have to reveal what that plan is. And chances are if it were in the least bit viable someone else would already have proposed it in non-theatrical form. Most of the peace plans still in play are pretty shopworn, the romance long since drained out of them: a return to 1967 borders with some adjustments and abandonment of settlements, etc. The sort of stuff that gets Thomas Friedman squealing orgasmically before Crown Prince Abdullah would seem dull and technical in a drama. So instead Gurney gives us his own peace proposal, via Amira's terrorist son: a Federated Republic of Israel and Palestine.

Well, give him credit. At least he doesn't bother paying lip service to a "two-state solution," which, for many if not most Palestinians, is an intermediate stage to a one-state solution. Gurney takes us there in one leap: bye, bye, Israel, in the sense of a sovereign state with its own seat at the UN; never again would an Israeli Olympic team be slaughtered because Israel would no longer have an Olympic team. Instead, it would be one-half of a federal state, like Belgium or St. Kitts and Nevis. Once upon a time, this wasn't so absurd. When the Balfour Declaration spoke of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the British didn't necessarily see that as a commitment to a sovereign state. In the Twenties, many in the Colonial Office assumed they'd be governing indefinitely over a Palestine subdivided into Jewish and Arab provinces, and back then for many Jews, busy transforming

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barren strips of desert into fertile farmland, that would have been enough. In the Forties, Jordan's King Abdullah was occasionally prone to dreams of a Greater Syria in which all would be his subjects but Israel would be a largely autonomous Jewish province. You can see why it might have appealed . . . then. But six decades on the notion that Israel would simply extinguish itself to become one prop of a semi-Arab state dominated by a political elite that, even when you wean it off terrorism, is irredeemably corrupt and inept is simply preposterous. Only a daytripper in this ancient bog would mistake such a chimera for "fresh thinking."

But that's the theater for you. This plan, Hartwell insists, is the real deal because it gets to the heart of the problem: "When in God's name are we going to realize that we are all in this thing together?" Or, in the words of Rodney King, why can't we all just get along? To advance that end, the playwright posits a dubious equivalence between Hartwell Clark's submerged anti-Semitism and Amira's cheerfully upfront Jew-hating. This is the deficiency of a dinner-party view of the world. I would invite Gurney to take the most anti-Semitic American he's ever met and then imagine him multiplied by millions and moved to the West Bank: the result would be an immense improvement from the State of Israel's point of view. Reaching a deal with someone who doesn't want you in his country club or marrying his daughter is easy. Reaching a deal with someone who sends his daughter as a suicide bomber to kill you is something else.

It's up to Gurney if he wants to believe that America brought 9/11 on itself because of the Bush administration's support of Israel: he must know that, while Mohammed Atta and Co. were taking their flying lessons in Florida, Bill Clinton was holed up at Camp David with Arafat and Barak, schmoozing the latter into giving the former more than any other Israeli Prime Minister has ever before offered the Palestinians. But, even with the wryly self-mocking dodge of the play-within mechanism, the sense here is of a playwright unable to do little more than flounder in post-9/11 counter-tribalism (as John O'Sullivan calls it). As Amira, the admirable and under-appreciated Rita Wolf is unable to do much more than occasionally blur the smugness of her character. As Hartwell, the likable Stephen Rowe (last seen in *The Goat*) is miscast. As Sally, Priscilla Shanks puts a human face on a somewhat arid role. Jim Simpson stages the production in what looks like a conference room at an EconoLodge, but no matter how much nudging and winking the play does it's never quite enough to excuse just how earnest the tone is, how contrived the premise and how generic the dialogue: "We had a good thing going, didn't we, Amira?"

The Middle East is well-tilled soil: I disagreed with many of the conclusions of David Hare's *Via Dolorosa*, but his journalistic detail was vivid and fair; John Patrick Shanley's *Dirty Story* (currently at the Harold Clurman Theatre) is a goofy comedic allegory, but it understands almost instinctively that this conflict continues not because of the absence of peace plans but for more fundamental reasons. In Shanley's piece, Wanda and Brutus are trapped in a sado-masochistic relationship in Brutus' flat, until Frank shows up and gives Wanda a gun. Wanda (as in Wandaring Jew?) is Israel, Brutus is Palestine, Frank is America, and Frank's pal Watson is Britain. Both Wanda and Brutus have claims to the apartment, but Wanda wins and forces Brutus into a tiny cramped corner of floor space. On the other hand, she does make extensive improvements to her part of the real estate. Put like that it sounds ridiculous, and in square footage terms it overlooks the fact that the first thing Britain did with the Palestine mandate was slice off most of it to invent the Emirate of Transjordan: strictly speaking, Brutus needs a brother in the adjoining apartment, and a lot of crazy friends in the rest of the building. But, that aside, these allegorical characters have a mad energy completely lacking in Gurney's play,

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and in a strangely moving way they capture the size of the conflict. No solutions are offered because none, Shanley implies, exist. Whether or not you share that conclusion, *O Jerusalem* seems by comparison shallow and very shaky on the facts.

I mentioned earlier that, in different hands, Gurney's structure—an internal play on which the actors comment as they proceed—might have worked very well. I was thinking of Glyn O'Malley's new and (to date) unperformed play, *Paradise*, which was cancelled by Cincinnati's Playhouse in the Park earlier this year. Its topic was the suicide bombing of March last year by an eighteen-year-old Palestinian girl, Ayat al-Akhras, whose victims included a seventeen-year-old Israeli girl, Rachel Levy. After a *Newsweek* cover story linked victim and murderer, the Playhouse in the Park asked O'Malley to write a play on the subject. He did the decent liberal thing and bent over backwards to be "balanced"—which is to say, as in Gurney's play, the Palestinian gets all the best lines and the Israeli is a vulgar airhead. Not "balanced" enough? Don't worry, O'Malley moved the location of the bombing from within Israel proper to one of those "illegal" West Bank settlements. And let's not get into any of that Muslim/Jew business—in this version the suicide bomber was acting strictly for socio-economic issues unconnected to any particular religion.

And what happened? At a read-through before invited members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, it was the latter who were steamed, denouncing the work as "Zionist propaganda." The row quickly escalated and, within a few days, the play had been cancelled.

Hang on a minute. When Andres Serrano offers *Piss Christ* or Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi* gives us a gay Jesus hot for anal sex with Judas, that's just "courageous" and "transgressive" and part of an "artist's responsibility" to society. But when Muslims complain that a pro-Muslim play is insufficiently pro-Muslim, the courageous transgressives cancel the production and enter the witness protection program. Judging from Christopher Caldwell's account in *The Weekly Standard*, O'Malley's work is far less interesting than the controversy it provoked. Don't look to the play for any meaningful insights into Muslim, Jewish, and western sensibilities, look to the surrounding hoo-ha. If anyone in Cincinnati or anywhere else ever gets around to staging *Paradise*, they should borrow a leaf out of Gurney's book: perform the play with the actors being interrupted by ever more frantic rewrites as the author tries desperately to anticipate any likely offence. The structure of *O Jerusalem* and the fate of *Paradise* make the same point: in plays on this topic, the real drama is off-stage.

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Art

The house gods of Elie Nadelman

by James Panero

Where lies the final harbor whence we unmoor no more? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it.
—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Elie Nadelman died on December 28, 1946. Within the week, the art enthusiast Lincoln Kirstein, best known as general director of the New York City Ballet, paid a visit to the Nadelman home in Riverdale, The Bronx. The estate was a bohemian plot called Alderbrook. In the final years of his life, Nadelman had suffered many personal and professional setbacks: the loss of much of his fortune in the 1929 stock market crash, a withdrawal from exhibiting in the 1930s and 1940s, the forced selling off of his personal collection of European and American folk art in 1936.

Yet what Kirstein found in the attic and studio of the Nadelman home that day, lining the shelves and tables in place of his folk art collection, was an abundance of creation: hundreds of crude plaster dolls and figurines, all female, some on their backs, others suspended upside down, cast from similar molds by Nadelman but reshaped, painted, and mashed up in various ways; Henri Cartier-Bresson set about photographing these rooms in 1947.

Kirstein, who became Nadelman's central protector and promoter in death, went on to enlarge two such figures into nineteen-foot-tall marble statues for the New York State Theater. In doing so, however, he negated their crudity and ubiquity within Nadelman's private sculptural system. Over fifty years later, the strangeness of Nadelman's final specimens have not diminished with time. One may say that these votive objects, in a special way, epitomized the relationship Nadelman maintained with the material world throughout his career.

Elie Nadelman was a pilgrim and a wanderer. As a pilgrim he believed that there could be idealism in form. As a wanderer he never found it. Instead, he collected the mental and physical charms and bric-à-brac that passed him on the route of his quixotic journey. Aesthetically, ethnically, and geographically he was both modernism's gypsy and its pack rat. His sources of influence came from the far-off reaches of early classical and Hellenistic Greece, from the polychrome woodwork of Veit Stoss and Tilman Riemenschneider, from the folk art, advertisements, and set pieces of the American circus and vaudeville, from Polish peasant art, from Asian and Egyptian sculpture. Ethnically, Nadelman was born in 1882 into a Polish family in the nation that did not at the time exist; he was an assimilated Jew in a country where Polish nationalism was hostile to Jewish life; he was raised in a well-off and elegant household, classically educated at the Warsaw Gymnasium and the Warsaw School of Drawing, a subject of the Tsar,

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who left for Munich and Paris in 1904 and New York in 1914 never to return.

Nadelman's fortunes were peripatetic and fleeting. He found early acclaim in Paris as a young rival to Picasso and in New York as an equal to Gaston Lachaise. Handsome and reserved, he married Viola Speiss Flannery, a rich American widow, in 1919. Following a decade in the social elite, he lost much of his wealth in the Great Depression, the banks foreclosed on his Upper East Side townhouse, and he nearly lost Alderbrook. It was here in the 1920s that he and Viola had amassed one of the first large collections of American folk art, only to lose it in 1936. While producing some of the most personal and affecting pieces of his career, like the plaster figurines uncovered by Kirstein, Nadelman's artistic reputation fell into critical neglect. At the same time, his Polish family and childhood community were falling victims to the Nazi death machine. Besieged by heart problems in early 1946, this survivor across the Atlantic committed suicide by slitting his wrists and bleeding to death in the bathtub of his Bronx home.

Nadelman's life could be the material of a lurid novel. Yet his eclecticism, driven experimentation, and deep traditionalism made him a touchstone sculptor in twentieth-century art, although his legacy remains unfulfilled and widely unknown. Despite a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1948, with a catalogue by Kirstein (who organized the show), and a large retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1975, with a catalogue by John Baur, Nadelman is unforthcoming even in death.

It's hard then to say what effect the Whitney Museum's current exhibition, with an excellent, well-researched catalogue essay by Barbara Haskell, will have on Nadelman's future reputation.[1] For anyone concerned about the future of art, Nadelman is one of American art's last untapped resources. His awareness of aesthetic history was on par with Ezra Pound's and his sophistication with T. S. Eliot's. Yet the Whitney's flimsy attempt to recast Nadelman as a "sculptor of modern life" who presaged pop art (!) and minimalism (?) through an appreciation of high and low culture, or one who made postmodern gestures during the height of modernism, is more than misleading. It is disheartening. This is the singular disappointment of the show (and I ask, from whom at the Whitney does this narrow interpretation always come?). In his handling of form and the importance he placed upon objects, Nadelman was among the most traditional of sculptors and someone whose idealization of the art object would be anathema to the kitsch and conceptual products of the 1960s and 1970s. He matched his rigor with an inquisitiveness and a reach that extended beyond the purview of almost any other twentieth-century artist. He was anything but pop.

In *The Enchafèd Flood*, his three critical essays on the romantic spirit, W. H. Auden understood the polemical posture of the romantic artist.

> For every individual the present moment is a polemical situation, and his battle is always on two fronts: he has to fight against his own past, not only his personal past but also those elements in the previous generation with which he is personally involved—in the case of a poet, for instance, the poetic tradition and attitudes of the preceding generation—and simultaneously he has to fight against the present of others, who are a threat to him, against the beliefs and attitudes of the society in which he lives which are hostile to his conception of art.

Throughout Nadelman's changing styles and materials—plaster, papier-mâché, bronze, marble, wood, terra-cotta—he maintained a constancy and doggedness of artistic pur-

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1 "Elie Nadelman: Sculptor of Modern Life" opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on April 3 and remains on view until July 20, 2003. A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by the Whitney Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc. (240, $60).

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pose even if this unity was based on abnegation and reinvention. In his struggle to break with the art of his own generation and that of the immediate past, he reached deep, into forgotten history, and wide, bypassing the systems of the academy.

Nadelman believed in the perfectibility of the curve as the unit of artistic creation. His early ink sketches from 1907 to 1909 that fill the first rooms at the Whitney, often drawing out the female form with the barest economy of line and hatchmark, testify to his persistence (and also announce a protocubist sensibility). The curve informed the smooth rounding of form, at times Maillolesque, that one finds in nearly all of Nadelman's plastic work. Yet while he pursued the notion of idealism in art, he went against the belief that either natural or personal spiritualism could be contained in the art object itself, placing him at odds with Wassily Kandinsky and his *On the Spiritual in Art* (1912), as well as with others in the movements towards both expressionism and pure abstraction. It sent Nadelman on his own course. Meyer Schapiro once wrote about Nadelman that

> His is not an uncommon type of modern artist, although distinct as an individual. The dream of a quintessential or supreme art is a mark of his kind; I feel something narcissistic there and a doom. Such a man can hardly grow and his change must appear to him somehow as a compromise and adaptation. He could not utilize in his art the conflict and imperfection of his own contemporaries. The *beautiful* has too great finality.

Sculpture in twentieth-century art seemed to go one of two ways: with Lachaise, Giacometti, and (figurative) Picasso towards hand-molded self-expression, and with Brancusi and (abstract) Picasso towards an untouchable, gleaming, machine-like perfectionism. Nadelman pursued a third route. Although approaching form with the sensibility and nuance of a fine artist, he drew on the vernacular tradition of the artisan and its culture of useful objects and multiple production. Even the classical heads guarding the start of the Whitney show, seemingly inconsistent with most people's histories of modernism (except for those raised within Germany's classicizing culture), resemble more the Roman copies of Praxiteles' sculptures than their Greek originals. Nadelman regularized the features of the head from the angular and expressive work of 1908 (like his raffish plaster *Head*, recorded in a photo, since destroyed) down to the smoothed-out haircuts, braids, and barrettes of 1910 to 1913 (the many *Classical Heads* of *c.* 1910–1911).

The *usefulness* of these objects was made all the more real when Helena Rubinstein, the cosmetics magnate, purchased Nadelman's entire run of his 1911 London show to display in her salons as exemplars of female beauty. The figures she bought are so smooth that they look, can we say, even *worn down* with an imagined history of wear and tear. This is underscored by the illusion at the necklines of objects that had cracked off of marble bodies, now lost. These are sculptures specifically designed to resemble, if not impersonate, objects with a shop-worn past.

Once in the United States, Nadelman followed the lines of inquiry he developed in Paris but incorporated a new fascination with folk and peasant art. One early development, perhaps almost too obvious in its significance, was Nadelman's reassigning of Mercury's classical helmet (*Mercury Petassos I* & *II* [*c.* 1914]) into a gentleman's bowler hat. His *Man in the Open Air* (*c.* 1915) remains a masterpiece of the period. With the application of a simplified bow tie, Nadelman transformed the classical figure into the shadow of a modern man: his diminutive size and shape, his flattened forms (a tree-branch intersects his right arm), and his worn-down surface at the shoulders, torso, and hat enable this sculpture to occupy positions as both a human resemblance and a specific object. A rapid outpouring of creativity soon followed as Nadelman produced a menagerie of bark-

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ers, dancers, musicians, and circus performers in wood, plaster, and metal, many polychromed with variegated applications of paint, seemingly capturing a vernacular of weather-beaten, hand-rubbed, and chipped genre figures.

These critical successes, so iconically Nadelman's (such as *Tango*, *c.* 1920–1924), did not extend past 1925.

One might argue that the production to follow was his most important aesthetically, even if it was not widely viewed or collected. This phase began with the eerie galvano-plastiques (for example, *Seated Woman with Raised Leg*, *c.* 1925–1926) and led up to Nadelman's late-style plaster figurines. In *Elie Nadelman*, Lincoln Kirstein's 1973 monograph of the artist that was twenty-five years in the making and is still the most important piece of Nadelman scholarship (only 3075 copies of the lavish title were ever printed), Kirstein framed the argument in this way:

> With Nadelman, who revealed so little of himself on the surface, whose private personality seems as impenetrably reflective as the stony skins he polished, such ambivalence or arrested development poses puzzles which his final figures may solve.

"Was Nadelman," asks Kirstein, "only a self-conscious artist, or a soul attempting to probe consciousness in a self?" On this the great artist remains silent.

Exhibition notes

"Nell Blaine, Artist in the World:
Works from the 1950s"
at Tibor de Nagy Gallery.
March 22, 2003–April 26, 2003

Nell Blaine (1922–1996) can tell a story through a remarkable economy of language. Her best work is lyrical, self-aware, in control, and inviting without the hints of self-indulgence that befell many in the New York School.

A native of Richmond, Virginia, Blaine began her career in New York as an abstract painter and the precocious student of Hans Hofmann. In 1944, at the age of twenty-one, she became the youngest member of the American Abstract Artists Group; her Mondrian-inspired, purely abstract paintings from the period remain well known and collected. She formed fast friendships with many artists on the scene, in particular those who were associated with the figurative, second generation of the New York School—Leland Bell, Robert De Niro, Albert Kresch, and Louisa Matthiasdottir (whose work was also exhibited in New York in April, at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries). Blaine was everywhere, even teaching painting to a young Larry Rivers, with whom she lived in France in 1950. A visit to the painter Jean Hélion in Paris that same year proved to be fateful to her artistic development, and she attributed her travels in France to inspiring a reawakening of painting's possibilities.

It was through Blaine's return to representation and the figure, as seen through the eyes of an artist trained in abstraction, that she arrived at a new personal style in the 1950s. The latest exhibition at Tibor de Nagy followed Blaine from the rigid structures of Léger-type cubism in 1950 to a rapid loosening of line and color that, in its balance of freedom and control, approached a high style around 1959, the year she contracted a crippling case of polio while on tour in Greece; the disease nearly ended her life.

After Milkweed (1958), a centerpiece at Nagy, might serve as a précis for the simple perfection that Blaine could achieve in the fifties. Constructed of an assembly of wide lines, commas, swizzles, and curlicues of color, this still-life of flowers and vase tempers a riot of color with an even consistency of structure and surface treatment. That which develops and runs wild is what Blaine permits; the freedom of line and color never strays far from the leash. "I never really left abstraction" she once remarked. "The sense of organization and the way of putting a

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picture together come from the abstract days."

Yet the control that Blaine exhibits over her representational work did not come without experimentation and false starts. The daubs and color fields of *Public Square* (1951) lack cohesion and unity. The wild paint application of *Merry-Go-Round* (1955) swirls out beyond the artist's reach. The successes come when Blaine was able to render out the irregularities of application through a slow boil of liquid, soapy pigment stirred in with a mix of wavy paint-handling—for example in the rippling *Imaginary View of Mexico* (1957), the shimmering *Gloucester Harbor, Dusk* (1958), and the hazy, Bonnardesque *Interior at Stupa* (1959)—painted during her stay in Greece. These works are *big* successes, and they herald a career that was not cut short by disease in 1959, but one that underwent a regeneration—we'll have to wait for the next Tibor de Nagy exhibition to see *that* one up close. It should be another delight.

—*James Panero*

"Titian"
at the National Gallery, London.
February 19, 2003–May 18, 2003

With the exception of the museum personnel whose livelihood depends on them, nobody likes a crowd at an art exhibition. Aesthetic experience isn't encouraged by peering over the shoulders of a half-a-dozen onlookers, the tinny squawk of audio tours, or waiting on what are often onerous lines. Looking at a painting or sculpture is a one-to-one encounter that benefits from an unimpeded view, an amplitude of time, and peace and quiet. That these attributes are absent from the typical blockbuster show doesn't mean that a real engagement with art is impossible. Only a cynic could claim that the nuances of a Leonardo drawing couldn't make themselves known through a thicket of gallery-goers. Nor do I want to insinuate that the glories of art should be the purview of a privileged few. It's just that there's no denying that the pedestrian traffic one encounters at a museum can make the solace we seek from art a hassle to obtain.

Which isn't to say that the same crowds can't tell us something about the art they are viewing. The exhibition I saw prior to visiting London's National Gallery—where a retrospective of paintings by the Venetian painter Tiziano Vecellio (*c.* 1487–1576), better known as Titian, is on display—was the Matthew Barney show at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Comparing the two shows might seem spurious work. What can such radically disparate events hope to tell us about the art audience? One answer is that no artist, not even a Renaissance master, is invulnerable to hype (though he is likely to be less dependent on it than the art scene's latest culture starlet). Many people visit big museum shows because they are, as it is said, the place to be.

Another answer to the question is that the manner in which crowds move through an art exhibit can be a fairly reliable indicator of the quality of work on view. Visitors to the Guggenheim drift past Barney's spectacle as if they instinctively know that it isn't worth bothering with in the first place. Visitors to the National Gallery, in contrast, take their time and get up close to Titian's paintings. The crowd I wrestled with in order to view *The Andrians* (*c.* 1523–1524) was hunched around it as if they couldn't bear to leave the canvas until its last virtue had been absorbed. Given how various, abundant, and sexy its virtues are, one felt curmudgeonly begrudging them their concentration.

"Titian" is the first of three exhibitions the National Gallery will dedicate to painters of the Renaissance; El Greco and Raphael are on the docket for 2004. If the museum's current show is any indication, the future exhibitions are likely to enthrall and frustrate, at least a bit. Comprised of only forty or so paintings, a number that includes a trio of pictures by Dosso Dossi and collaborations with Giovanni Bellini and Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, "Titian" is less

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extensive an exhibition than one might have hoped for. One understands, of course, that matters of conservation prevent museums from lending—and possibly endangering—their treasures; definitive exhibitions are becoming less possible. And it should quickly be mentioned that "Titian" doesn't stint on masterpieces—any show that includes *A Man with a Quilted Sleeve* (*c.* 1510), the aforementioned *Andrians*, *Danae* (1544–1546), *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–1523) and the charming *Clarissa Strozzi* (*c.* 1542) merits a stopover. So, one shouldn't grouse too much.

Still, there are notable absences here, to name just a few: *The Venus of Urbino* (before 1538), *Man with the Glove* (*c.* 1520) and *Concert Champêtre* (1510–1511), a canvas whose attribution is, admittedly, in dispute. (Once attributed to Giorgione and then to Titian, the painting now has a third candidate proposed for its authorship: the little known Domenico Mancini.) As a consequence of these and other omissions, "Titian" feels curt and punchy; its abbreviation leaves one wanting more.

The artist that emerges from the National Gallery show is a monumental figure, but not an ingratiating one. Titian is, at least initially, distant and aloof; the paintings are, notwithstanding their mastery, resistible. The primary reason for this is Titian's emphasis on surface. Even in the earliest piece on view, *The Virgin and Child ("The Gypsy Madonna")* (*c.* 1511), the features of the painting—whether it be the title figures, the landscape or the various draperies pictured therein—are delineated more through value than texture. Texture, here and throughout the *oeuvre*, is predominantly the surface of the canvas itself, uniform and coarse. From the outset, a pictorial scrim is established between the viewer and the image.

Titian doesn't readily invite entry to his paintings; he challenges the eye by throwing a roadblock in its path. This frankness about material means only increased as Titian grew older. The later pieces in particular—one thinks of *The Flaying of Marsyas* (*c.* 1570–1576) and *The Death of Actæon* (*c.* 1565–1576)—are enveloped in a fog of flurried oils. A colleague informs me that this quality has been linked to the subsuming haze of Venice. It can also be attributed to Titian's wish for the physicality of oils to remain relatively unencumbered, a tack that did not go unremarked upon by his contemporaries. The artist's friend Pietro Aretino, after commissioning a portrait from Titian, ultimately rebuked him for not suitably finishing it. Giorgio Vasari, writing in *Lives of the Artists*, stated that Titian's "later work is done in bold strokes and dashes, and if seen too near, the effect is confusing."

Vasari then went on to state that a late Titian, seen "at a distance . . . is perfect." He was right, of course. To insist that Titian is all surface all the time is to reduce his art to the narrowest of painterly extremes. The more time one spends with the paintings the more perceptive, humane, and even cagey Titian becomes. The depth of feeling he brought to Biblical subjects like *The Entombment* (1559), *Ecce Homo* (*c.* 1570), and the enchantingly tender *Virgin and Child with Saint Catherine and a Shepherd ("The Madonna of the Rabbit")* (1530) is limitless. His ability to capture the psychology of his subjects—whether it be the unhealthy relationship that existed between Georges d'Armagnac, Bishop of Rodez, and his secretary Guillaume Philandrier or a Pope whose august demeanor could not disguise a parsimoniousness of spirit—inspires awe. Few artists have cut so quickly to the essence of their sitters. This is especially true of the late self-portraits. Unflinching in their honesty and cunningly self-conscious, they are the work of a man aware of his own mortality yet confident in how history will judge him—that is to say, highly. Late Titian, unlike late Rembrandt, did not lack in humility. It goes to the scale of Titian's genius that we take pleasure in his arrogance.

—*Mario Naves*

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Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

The conductor Dennis Russell Davies has given much of his life to contemporary music—and contemporary composers are lucky for it. Luckier than they deserve, in some cases. Davies is both a talented and a well-schooled musician, effective in just about anything he leads. He was a co-founder of the American Composers Orchestra in 1977, and relinquished its directorship only last year. He has also had ample experience in the opera house. Though most closely identified with contemporary music, he has taken care not to pigeonhole himself.

I might note that Davies has undergone a remarkable change of appearance in the course of his career. When he was younger, he sported a ponytail—which is not something you see on a podium every night. Now he is utterly bald, in the manner of Kojak, or—perhaps more aptly—his fellow conductor Christoph Eschenbach. Davies might be said to be a tonsorial extremist.

Like most conductors today, he is busy and peripatetic, but his principal jobs seem to be opera chief in Linz and director of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra. It is with the SCO that he appeared recently in Carnegie Hall. Their program was an appealing one, consisting of a Haydn symphony, Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, and a new piece by William Bolcom. Davies is a longtime champion of Bolcom, as he is of just about every living American composer. Earlier in the season, he'd led the New York premiere—at the Metropolitan Opera—of Bolcom's opera *A View from the Bridge*.

The Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra happens to be in the midst of what it calls its "Haydn Decade." This includes the recording of all of those symphonies—the full 104. The symphony chosen for Carnegie Hall was No. 65, in A major, which is rarely heard. In fact, it had never been performed in this historic hall, which is supposed to have seen more or less everything.

Tonally, Davies and the SCO struck a nice balance in this Classical score. By that I mean that they did not sound too polished or glossy, and did not sound too scratchy or primitive (as some of the original-instruments bands do). They were somewhere in between. The symphony came off with clarity and sprightliness, qualities that this work—like other Haydn pieces—requires. The Andante was exceedingly graceful, and the concluding Presto was bracingly crisp.

Davies is a relatively "straight" conductor, who allows for imagination and inspiration. You might think that, as a vessel for contemporary music, he would evince an anything-goes mentality on the podium. But he is actually a fairly "conservative" conductor, mindful of a composer's intentions and of general musical taste.

The SCO did not deliver the most precise performance of Tchaikovsky's Serenade you ever heard, but it is always a pleasure to hear this dear little work: One forgets how good it is. Davies treated it with dignity and

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care. The ending of the Elégie was positively ethereal. I might have liked a Finale more vigorous, less chamberly—it could even have been raucous—but the conductor's politeness was not to be disdained.

The big news of this evening was the Bolcom work: *Medusa*, which is subtitled "Monodrama for Dramatic Soprano and String Orchestra." That is a tidy summing up of the piece. Bolcom has had a good year in New York, same as he always does, really. He is never without a new piece to unveil, and they are invariably interesting. They are also extremely diverse. You never know what Bolcom will show you next. He is called an "eclectic" composer, and some critics consider him scattered, unfocused; but at least he makes you sit forward in your chair.

Bolcom composed this extraordinary *Medusa* with his longtime collaborator, the writer Arnold Weinstein. Bolcom and Weinstein are as much a team as Bolcom and Morris (meaning Joan Morris, the composer's singer wife, with whom he performs cabaret songs and the like). Weinstein came up with a brilliant libretto on the Medusa theme. As Bolcom says in his accompanying notes, "I have tried to sail my musical boat according to [Weinstein's] laid-out course—a wild ride full of surprises—affording Catherine Malfitano a real tour de force as well as one for Maestro Davies' virtuoso strings." He continues, "[T]he grand curve of the work traverses [Medusa's] early beauty, her horrifying transformation, and her death, which again leaves beauty in its wake."

The composer has already mentioned the star performer for us, Catherine Malfitano, a steely, electric, gutsy American soprano. Like Davies, she is a longtime associate of Bolcom (and of Weinstein). She, in fact, is a crucial element of *A View from the Bridge* (which features a libretto by Weinstein fashioned from the Arthur Miller play). Malfitano is one of our most complete singing actresses. She's a hell-for-leather soprano, letting it all hang out, but somehow not going over the top. You feel, when you see and hear her, that you have been given the full operatic experience.

Certainly, no singer could be better qualified to deliver *Medusa*. She even looked like that creature, meaning no disrespect, for Malfitano is an attractive woman. But she so inhabited this character that she seemed to change before our eyes: and she frightened. Malfitano spoke many of her lines, and shouted others, and sang still more. Text, music, and part seemed to meld in her. She transfixed her audience. She delivered, indeed—just as Bolcom hoped—a tour de force. This was a performance that will stick with me a long time. It's hard to imagine that anyone else could do it. The audience was reluctant to stop applauding, and to leave.

One nice thing about both Bill Bolcom and Arnold Weinstein is that they don't take themselves too seriously. They are serious artists, all right: but they are free of pretentiousness, and they know that a little fun is part of art, even high art. Try out a Weinstein couplet: "Tongues of desire flickered in eyes,/ Even the eunuchs' tunics would rise." At one point, Medusa says, "My body is still finger-lickin' fine." She also cries, "Come see this monster Medusa, this gruesome muse of ugliness, this deformed enormity," who was so very different in "the sweet used-to-be." I don't know about you, but that phrase "sweet used-to-be" is devastating to me.

Bolcom's score grips and startles and amuses throughout, qualifying as a triumph. He has given us a meaningful career, composing music that is not only intelligent but satisfying to hear. That may seem like modest praise, but, given our current musical straits, it is not.

Everyone likes to monkey around with Bach, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center decided to do its part. It concocted a festival called "Bach Variations," just in case people got tired of plain old Bach. The Cantor of Leipzig has been messed with in a variety of ways. And I always contend—call it a Rule—that you can't

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ruin him. No matter how you transcribe him, or intrude on him—with dancers or circus animals or what have you—you cannot bury him. He and his greatness will out.

I have said the same about that other supreme genius, Shakespeare. No matter how much you try to ruin him, he will out. He is unkillable. Sometimes, I acknowledge, this Rule is sorely put to the test: but it generally holds up.

Part of "Bach Variations" was an evening entitled "Point-Counterpoint: Bach's *Art of the Fugue*." The Chamber Society commissioned ten brief new works from ten composers, the works being "companion pieces" to contrapuncti from *The Art of the Fugue*—all for the Brentano String Quartet. It was an odd idea, but it worked out.

In his program notes, Mark Steinberg, first violinist of the quartet, explained:

> By asking composers to write "commentary" pieces as companions to selected contrapuncti from the Bach work the Brentano String Quartet is presenting an evening of Bach and contemporary composers' musical reaction to his work. We have asked each composer to write a short piece that reflects on a particular Bach fugue, each in his or her own idiom. [The PC language—"his or her"—is de rigueur. But be thankful it wasn't "their."] As well as being a celebration of Bach and of composing, this project represents a celebration of the tenth anniversary of our quartet, and we have chosen composers with whom we have had exciting and meaningful collaborations over this span of years. . . . It is our belief that this program will make for a compelling evening of listening, linking the past to the present, and giving us all the opportunity to listen to the music of Bach through the ears of some of the great composers of our own time.

Nicely said, huh? Although I would object that Bach is never "past." I dare say that he is more present than all of the ten still-working composers put together. But there is no need to be (too) petulant, and one of course takes Steinberg's point.

Those ten composers included Charles Wuorinen, Nicholas Maw, Sofia Gubaidulina, Steven Mackey—even Wynton Marsalis. It was a nice lineup, and each composer was distinctive. The way it worked was, the Brentano String Quartet would play a Bach contrapunctus, and then would come the contemporary composer's "commentary" on it. (About half the time, the order was reversed. In the case of one entry—Mackey's—the Bach and the new were interspersed.) The experiment was, in a way, a study in today's composers and composing. You got snapshots of them, all fulfilling the same task, in one neat album.

I must say, however, that it was nice to hear the straight stuff—to hear portions of *The Art of the Fugue* themselves. One effect this evening had on me was to make me want to hurry home and put on the entire *Art of the Fugue*, in string-quartet version. No matter how they monkey with Bach, the monkeying sort of leads you home again: to Bach himself.

It virtually goes without saying that the Brentano String Quartet played superbly, for this is one of the greatest such ensembles in the world. The alertness, cohesion, and musicality of this quartet are a continuing marvel. I might single out the playing of Nina Maria Lee, the cellist, in Gubaidulina's "commentary": It combined modern spikiness and Romantic passion, reminding me of the playing of Natalia Gutman, the extraordinary Russian cellist. This was, again, an evening both unusual and worthwhile.

They are "the Love Couple," and everyone likes to snipe at them. Who are they? Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck? No, in the operatic world, they are Angela Gheorghiu, soprano, and Roberto Alagna, tenor. They are married to each other, and they are fodder for the press—even the tabloid press!—for they are attractive, willful, and "controversial" (to use the catch-all, though mysterious, term). That they are both first-rate singers is our main concern here.

She is probably greater than he, but he has his nights too. They frequently sing

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together—sometimes it seems that they *exclusively* sing together—and many critics seem to want them to fail. Gheorghiu and Alagna seldom oblige. I remember an *Elixir of Love*, at the Metropolitan Opera, in particular: It was an almost perfect evening of bel canto opera, lithe, fizzy, and fun. Why would anyone ever want to be crabby about them?

Their most recent outing at the Met was in *Faust*, and they again proved an excellent pairing, and excellent separately. In my view, this long-popular opera can be boring: that is, boringly performed, boringly produced. It never sagged at the Met, thanks to Gheorghiu's Marguerite and Alagna's Faust, and also to the Méphistophélès of James Morris. Credit, too, should be given to the conductor in the pit, Bertrand de Billy, whom I had found pedestrian before, but who was plenty alive on this occasion.

Gheorghiu has one of the most splendid voices now before the public—it is beautiful, but, perhaps more important, it is interesting. She has a technique that allows her to sing a range of roles, and she has an inherent musical sense. With all of her powers, she was able to enliven even "Il était un roi de Thulé," which can put a damper on any evening of *Faust*. She is a coloratura soprano—among other types—but she is not a songbird. She is a coloratura with body and strength. Her Jewel Song was probably the most exciting I have heard.

Alagna is a seriously beautiful singer, whose pitch can unfortunately falter and who is prone to some dullness. He had a capital night in *Faust*, however. He has a smallish voice, but he can fill a large house like the Met without much strain. Often, power—particularly on top—can come out of nowhere. His voice is creamy but with a ring—greatly desirable for a tenor. Furthermore, it was a pleasure to hear such correct and natural French. Alagna may be said to benefit from two worlds: He was born to Sicilian parents in Paris.

James Morris is an old operatic hand, and he makes for a splendid devil. (All basses have to give the devil his due; it is in the nature of the repertory. In fact, Samuel Ramey has just come out with a CD called *A Date with the Devil*.) Morris may be in the late afternoon of his career, but the sun has yet to set. He was magnificent last season as Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*. And you could hardly ask for a more effective Méphistophélès—even Ramey. Morris can put cold cruelty in his voice (think Scarpia). He can be uproariously funny as well. His Méphistophélès was more merry than despicable, and the devil, of course, got his in the end.

Maestro de Billy handled the orchestra beautifully. Some sections were tender, knowing, warm—kissed by a French transparency. Others were appropriately fiery. And this was a *Faust* remarkably free of sappiness. The concluding trio was thrilling, with Angela Gheorghiu blazing. If it were always accorded such treatment, Gounod's most famous opera would be less tired.

I must append a political-social note. As this *Faust* was in production, the war in Iraq began—and the Love Couple flew home to be with their children. Their decision was entirely defensible, especially as one learns the details of their unusual family. But it added to their reputation for flightiness. No one concerned primarily with music should much care.

Mstislav Rostropovich joined the New York Philharmonic for a three-week residence. This was a festival dubbed "Slava & Friends" ("Slava," of course, being the great cellist-conductor's nickname). The friends? Most of them were young, including the pianist Evgeny Kissin, the violinist Maxim Vengerov, and the cellist Xavier Phillips. Rostropovich was supposed to have had with him Martha Argerich, the legendary pianist, but she canceled, and was replaced by another fresh talent, Konstantin Lifschitz. Argerich, as you may know, is one of the most prolific cancellers of all time. She seems not to be marked down for it, however, as Angela Gheorghiu and Roberto Alagna are.

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The Slava-fest was full of goodwill and marvelous musicmaking. Many trees have been felled for the sake of describing, praising, and wondering over Mstislav Rostropovich; I have used a small forest myself. So I will not go on at length here. Suffice it to say that Slava does not decrease your admiration for him, or lessen your awe. The moment you begin to suspect that you and the world might have overrated him, he presents the glorious reality.

In his three weeks with the Philharmonic, he played only those composers he knew well and worked with closely. Of course, if he confined his career to only these composers, he could still go a long, long while before exhausting their music. He performed Prokofiev and Shostakovich, as you might expect. And also Dutilleux, Britten, Lutoslawski, Bernstein, and Penderecki. Everything Slava did had a ring of authority. But I have always argued that his intimacy with these composers is a side issue. He is a born musician, from the Land of Music, if you will. His Bach is no less impressive than his Shostakovich.

In one of these concerts, Maxim Vengerov joined him for the Britten Violin Concerto. This work can be played soullessly—but not when these two men are involved. No matter what the age difference between them, they are birds of a feather. Vengerov played with beauty and heart—but also with steel and modernism. He was at times sweet-toned, but then something-else-toned, as the score demanded. He employed many and various dynamics, and he made sure that every phrase counted: Nothing was wasted, or merely glossed over. Even so, this performance had a unity, with all thoughts relating to one another.

Vengerov is known as a splashy, impassioned violinist, but he knows the effectiveness of a clear but small amount of sound. Of his intonation, passagework, and so on, there is no question: He is all-capable. In the Vivace, he played with his relaxed arms, executing difficult music almost casually. And—like the bear on the podium—he is an utterly natural musician: He seemed to be making up some of the score on the spot (though he wasn't). The concluding movement—a passacaglia—had Britten's strange holiness and longing. When Vengerov—and Rostropovich—were through, one felt that the concerto had been exploited to the hilt. No more can be wrung out of it.

To risk some sentimentality, I might say that I felt grateful that these two musicians had a chance to play and work together. Generations separate them. Vengerov is pretty much just starting out; Rostropovich celebrated his seventy-sixth birthday during this festival. These are kindred spirits, as I've noted, and it's right that they didn't miss each other. It would have been a shame if they had.

Elsewhere on this program, Slava led the Philharmonic in Shostakovich's Symphony No. 9 and in selections from his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (and also from his revised version, called *Katerina Izmailova*). Slava captures the off-kilter genius of Shostakovich to perfection. The Ninth was not a model of technical precision; indeed, there was a good deal of clumsiness. But these things are overlooked for the musical trueness of the matter. The *Lady Macbeth* excerpts were, as always—especially with Rostropovich—a rousing affair. Every page had the right pace, the right emphasis.

In the final section—which was hair-raising, of course—Rostropovich lost his baton. It went up and back, landing on the head of a woman in the second row (I believe). I had never seen that in a concert. Slava never got it back, but he plowed ahead. And—predictably enough—he repeated that last, pulverizing *Lady Macbeth* section as an encore. Then he plunged into the orchestra, thanking them, kissing them, congratulating them, like a charged-up politician.

He is a great musician; and a great man. Take your choice—or celebrate both.

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The rise of the vocal recital

by Patrick J. Smith

One of the more interesting features of concert life in New York in the past decade has been the growth—one might almost say the ubiquity—of the vocal recital. By the "vocal recital" I mean the classic "art song evening," as opposed to an evening of opera arias. Historically, the "art song evening" was limited to inner-core music lovers, specialized recordings (such as those of the Hugo Wolf Society in the 1930s), and specialized voices, like that of Povla Frijsh—voices that had minimal, if any, contact with opera. Mostly, the vocal recital was a province of the German composers, with an important French subjunct, and it was performed with a distinct elevation in tone and attitude.

Today, there is hardly a week during the New York performing season that does not include vocal recitals, often several, and all which attract audiences. Indeed, the fifteen-year-old New York Festival of Song, founded by Michael Barrett and Steven Blier, which performs in the small Weill Hall of Carnegie Hall and in the larger Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College, is usually sold out to an enthusiastic crowd.

In addition, singers (especially English-speaking) who only rarely performed this repertory are doing so far more often and more thoroughly. Whereas earlier a Schubert group might appear along with a whole roster of nineteenth-century operatic chestnuts on an opera singer's concert list, today the Schubert group is the only nineteenth-century contribution to an entirely twentieth-century song program. Although the recording of classical music has severely declined in the past five years, that of vocal recitals by all types of singers—operatic and art song—have proliferated in the record stores, and traversals of entire song repertories—Schubert, Schumann, Poulenc, even Chabrier!—are common. A composer like Ned Rorem has seen much of his output recorded over the years by first-rate singers, and though much of it has been deleted from the catalogues, much remains in print.

What are the reasons for the success of the vocal recital? Is this a phenomenon limited to New York and the larger cities? Is it something that is a vogue, to disappear in another decade? Will the many young singers who are now studying the songs of Samuel Barber and Aaron Copland discard them for Mozart and Verdi? The answers, dependent upon a variety of factors that only tangentially correspond to the aesthetics of the song repertory, involve composers, singers, and performing arts groups. A vital factor is the general movement away from considering the art song as high art and towards considering it as more of a mainstream musical event.

Underlying these responses, of course, is a change in attitude towards a whole class of American composer once considered totally outside the pale: the composer of American musicals. Once, to mention Irving Berlin in the same aesthetic breath as Franz Schubert

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was to invite incredulity and mockery; now, the melodic shape of the vocal line of *What'll I Do* (1924) can stand comparison with anything Schubert wrote, and the composer William Bolcom has championed the works of the rock-and-roll duo of Lieber and Stoller (while himself writing excellent cabaret songs). This sea change of opinion has opened up the vocal recital to a larger range of works, and more younger singers have become attracted to the form. Moreover, young composers have contributed songs, in many cases for specific singers, which are programed more than once.

One cannot overestimate, furthermore, the effect of the commitment of a "star" on younger singers. A leading soprano like Renée Fleming, who consistently programs art songs and searches out different composers, has a dramatic influence on singers in conservatories and universities around the country. Similarly, the decision Marilyn Horne made when she retired from the stage to concentrate on encouraging young art-song performers has had dramatic consequences for the field. She has given unstintingly to her task. Each year at the Juilliard School, the Marilyn Horne Foundation presents a series of master classes and a gala recital. Throughout the year the Foundation arranges for recitals by young singers, which are usually broadcast.

Because of this interest in the art form by the singers themselves, and because these singers are learning to sing a repertory in their native language, there is now a growing group of young and middle-aged composers who are enriching the song repertory with individual songs and cycles—including Jake Heggie, John Musto, Ricky Ian Gordon, Jorge Martin, Libby Larsen, and Robert Beaser.

It must be said that most of these composers reside in the musical mainstream rather than in its avant-garde precincts. Their writing for the voice tends to be easily sung and consumed by the audience. The New York Festival of Song, which has long housed many of these composers, largely programs for a mainstream audience; if it ventures away from the classical mainstream, it is in the direction of more popular styles. Last year, for instance, there was an evening of songs written by P. G. Wodehouse, and often the songs programed are sort of an elevated type of lounge music with strong pop overtones. Similar ventures into avant-garde territory, or even such vocally challenging classics as Elliott Carter's settings of Elizabeth Bishop's poems, *A Mirror on Which to Dwell*, rarely occur. A song or two of Charles Ives may be programed for history's sake, but his concept of ear-stretching remains outside the concert room.

This multifaceted revitalization of a largely moribund art form has led to an increase in its audience, both in the concert hall and for CDs. Beyond those organizations already mentioned, other New York recital outlets have also contributed to the revitalization process. Such organizations include Joy in Singing, the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program of the Metropolitan Opera, and Lincoln Center as led by the artistic programer Jane Moss, who actively searches out and highlights new vocal recital talent. The tireless efforts on behalf of song by the ever-youthful Robert White were saluted last season in a tribute at the Metropolitan Museum's Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. In an effort to break down further the barrier between concert stage and listener, the Horne Foundation has begun to surtitle some of its recitals.

Another, less remarked-on, but important factor has been the singing itself. If the traditionally high art repertory is to appeal to a wider audience, it must be sung differently than it was in the past. The use of the plummy, artificial art song voice, as was employed, for example, by the fine recitalist John Charles Thomas, is one of the habits that accompanists and vocal coaches like Steven Blier are trying to eliminate. To be sure, the far more relaxed stage manner of the younger American singer today has aided in this regard, and the result has been a greater directness of communication.

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To what extent has the popularity of the vocal recital gone beyond the confines of New York, always the performance capital? Here the story becomes more clouded. The New York Festival has reached out to the cities of Boston and Washington with occasional concerts, and Blier maintains they have been enough of a success to want to expand them. Recently, in fact, the New York Festival has coupled with the San Francisco Opera to present one of its programs, with Blier, in San Francisco as part of the opera company's Schwabacher Debut Recital Series.

Yet, it remains true that, outside of New York, and possibly outside various university and conservatory series, the vocal recital remains as isolated from the musical flow of concert and opera as it was two decades ago. Even at Tanglewood, in the summer, vocal recitals in the small Ozawa Hall with major singers do not necessarily sell out, and responses in other cities with concert activity suggest that the phenomenon may be localized to New York.

There is a wider significance of this upsurge in the vocal recital and its content. What has happened, broadly, is a shift in repertory. This has been partially conditioned by the dwindling, if not outright disappearance, of what could be termed the Broadway Song Tradition, and the premier composers that fueled it. There are a few epigones left, but the Broadway musical repertory has been thoroughly taken over by various strains and offshoots of rock, where pounding rhythm and amplification take the place of song.

The world of the song, therefore, has moved away to the more limited world of the song recital, and if the composers who write for it have not the stature of those who preceded them on Broadway, they occupy the same rough area and appeal to much the same audience.

Groups like The New York Festival of Song are creating audiences for this amalgam of the present and the past, and are attracting both singers and composers. In addition, the old avant-garde continues in much the same strictly defined way as it did thirty years ago, in venues such as New York's Merkin Hall, while the more youth-oriented aspects of the repertory can be heard at the Miller Theater of Columbia University, in a dynamic series run by George Steel, and in such longtime arenas as Bang on a Can.

As long as there are prosyletizers for the song recital in the field—be it Barrett, Blier, Horne, or White—there will be a vocal recital presence, at least in New York. To what extent a generation of singers and composers will ingrain the vocal recital into the diminished world of the classical music recital remains to be seen. The phenomenon is clear enough in New York, for the present.

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The media

Superior to the truth

by James Bowman

How wonderfully appropriate that the public discovery of the most serious media scandal to come out of the war in Iraq should have been made by one of its authors—and in a statement which he himself obviously supposed was an occasion for self-congratulation rather than shame. Eason Jordan, the chief news executive of CNN, at least lost no time. Two days after the fall of Baghdad, he published an op ed in *The New York Times* disclosing that the network had concealed what it knew of the crimes of Saddam Hussein, some of which had been committed against its own employees. Naturally it also failed to disclose to viewers that such news as it was bringing them from Iraq had been purchased at the cost of its willingness to keep quiet about this much more newsworthy news.

Jordan wrote that these "awful things" could not be reported "because doing so would have jeopardized the lives of Iraqis, particularly those on our Baghdad staff." But of course it was only journalistic self-importance which made the existence of CNN's "Baghdad staff" into a datum of any moral significance. There was always the honorable option of closing the Baghdad bureau and reporting the truth from somewhere else. But as Jordan told Franklin Foer of *The New Republic* last autumn, the network's pride in its comprehensiveness was at stake and its Baghdad presence of overriding importance, "First, because it's newsworthy; second, because there's an expectation that if anybody is in Iraq, it will be CNN."

True, Mr. Jordan's concealment of acts of torture and murder was not effected without a pang. "I felt awful having these stories bottled up inside me," he revealed in his *Times* op ed, thereby meeting the one and universally recognized requirement for televisual absolution. In Oprah's world, feeling bad about something excuses almost everything. But apart from his sympathy for his own bad feelings, he showed no evidence of being in the least repentant over his concealment of information so material to his audience's understanding of what he had broadcast from Baghdad. He would thus presumably do the same thing again if called upon to do so by another dictator to whose prison-state CNN required "access," however limited. Indeed, it must be supposed that he and the network are already doing the same thing in such capitals as Damascus, Havana, and Pyongyang.

As in so many other ways, the media's worst fault is their inability to recognize where there is a fault. Peter Arnett, who notoriously reported from Baghdad for CNN during the first Gulf War, candidly told Foer months ago that "There's a *quid pro quo* for being there. You go in and they control what you do. . . . So you have no option other than to report the opinion of the government of Iraq." Not surprisingly, a man like Arnett who is used to paying such a price for his seconds and minutes on our

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television screens is going to take it in his stride when asked to say a few words on behalf of the Iraqi information ministry: "Within the United States there is growing challenge to President Bush about the conduct of the war and also opposition to the war. So our reports about civilian casualties here . . . help those who oppose the war," he told his Iraqi interviewer on March 30.

"Now," he went on, "America is re-appraising the battlefield, delaying the war, maybe a week, and re-writing the war plan. The first war plan has failed because of Iraqi resistance. Now they are trying to write another war plan." NBC fired him for this but without pointing out that his comments were not only spectacularly ill-judged and inappropriate, but also spectacularly false and probably the consequence of wishful thinking. The result was that, although he was at first moved to apologize for having said something so obviously gratifying to enemy propaganda in the enemy capital, he recanted his recantation after being hired by the anti-war London tabloid, *The Daily Mirror*, announcing that he would continue to report "the truth" about the war come what may. "I'm an agent of the cause of truth and information," he insisted.

That it was to prove within a week to be the exact opposite of the truth seems to have bothered him not at all. This is clearly a man accustomed to dealing in only those truths that are convenient for the moment, or for some partisan purpose. For neither did he see any inconsistency in proclaiming his attachment to "truth" in the pages of an avowedly anti-war newspaper. It's true that this was in the context of a media culture which makes much less of a shibboleth of "objectivity" than its American counterpart does. But even in Britain it is still not common for journalists to suppose that truth is a function of ideology, or that obvious falsehoods can go uncorrected because of the righteousness of the cause in which they are uttered.

Arnett's sense of proprietorship with respect to "truth" is more likely to be owing to his long association with American television networks whose Olympian pretensions occasionally peek out at us from remarks like Mr. Jordan's. Yet there's nothing like a war to expose the great central pretense of the journalistic "profession" that reporters are somehow supermen (and, of course, superwomen), capable like the gods themselves of standing above our petty human squabbles on a higher plane from the rest of us. Unto those cool and cloistered precincts—so we are given to suppose—the shrill cries of "partisanship" seldom reach. And when they do, those (almost exclusively conservative) who are deemed to be tainted with the stigma of partisanship are bid by their fellows to move farther off, and lower down.

It is all, of course, as complete a myth as Olympus itself. Conservatives are forever pointing out, rightly, the unfairness of the "partisan" label which places them on a different plane from those superior beings who broadcast the news. The consensus of the journalistic culture lies moderately left of center but by common consent is deemed to be "objective" and non-partisan itself so long as there is anybody to the Right or Left of it who can be labeled partisans solely for that reason. But why suppose a "centrist" position, as defined by any particular political context, is not quite as partisan as any "extremist" of the Left or the Right? Merely taking up a position in the middle—any middle will do—and being condemned by those on either side of one is, in the prevailing mythology of the media culture, a kind of guarantee of objectivity and "balance."

Thus Andrew Marr in *The Daily Telegraph* answered criticism of the BBC's pretty obvious anti-war and anti-American bias by writing: "For every minister grumbling about the Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation, there are plenty of anti-war people calling us the Blair-Bush Broadcasting Corporation." So that's all right then. "If both sides hate us, we must be doing something right," as American broadcasters customarily

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put it. But this doesn't follow at all. Both sides could be right, or neither. Or one could be right and one wrong. The fact that people complain is neither here nor there. People can complain about anything. Eric Alterman has lately been complaining that the American media are biased to the Right. The point lies in the details of the complaint and whether it is justified in the particular instance.

Also of some importance is the question of who is complaining. It is not possible for coverage not to be partial and therefore not to offend *somebody*. In fact it is not possible for it not to offend *somebody* on the Left, no matter how left-wing or *somebody* on the Right, no matter how right-wing. But if I were at the BBC I would be at least a little bit worried that the sailors of the Royal Navy on board the aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* asked that their BBC direct satellite feed be turned off on the grounds that their national, TV-license-payer-funded network "places more faith in Iraqi reports than information coming from British or Allied sources."

Not that anyone at the BBC seems to be fretting. Marr's view is echoed by Richard Sambrook, director of BBC News, who told Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post* that complaints against his network arise out of its "not having a particular country's agenda or values at the forefront of what we're doing. We try to take an international approach to the news, to a greater extent than any of the U.S. nets. We try to build in a perspective from other Arab countries." Kurtz himself plays the same trick by quoting, for balance, the views of a left-wing Labour MP as retailed by the London *Morning Star*—a tiny-circulation Communist-subsidized newspaper—that the BBC is too *pro*-American and setting it against the opinion of William Rees-Mogg, former editor of *The Times*, that it is "defeatist." See? They're being attacked from both sides. They must be doing something right.

Or, as Kurtz puts it, cheerfully buying into the BBC's self-justification, the network has adopted a "cover all sides" approach. It is of course nothing of the kind. Like everyone else, the BBC's correspondents choose the side they favor—in this case the official Iraqi version, mainly because it is anti-American. When Kurtz put to Sambrook the leaked internal memo of the network's own defense correspondent, criticizing his editors in London for reporting the opposite of the truth in order to emphasize allied setbacks, Sambrook replied with a sigh on the same, unvarying theme: "We're pleasing no one. . . . I get some criticism that we're too antiwar, and from the other side that we're a government mouthpiece and a spokesman for the coalition. That's inevitable, I think."

Inevitable or not, it is no excuse for actually *being* a mouthpiece and a spokesman for the Iraqis. Kurtz himself noticed that the BBC reported the increasingly hallucinatory claims of the Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, as if they were to be weighed equally with official British or American sources, as when there was said to be an uprising against Saddam Hussein in Basra: "Iraq has denied that there's been any uprising at all," reported Mishal Husain of "BBC World," and proceed to air a clip of al-Sahhaf saying: "I officially deny the hallucinations from the Americans, through CNN and others" and insisting that the people's response had instead been one of "resistance" and that "the invaders" had, like so many others on his telling, "found death."

Al-Sahhaf went on giving his daily briefings announcing setback after bloody setback for the American and British forces, and denying that any of the enemy were in Baghdad, until the correspondents at the briefing could look out of the window and see them across the street. Yet even al-Sahhaf can be explained by the nature of the Arab honor culture, which required him only to talk of great Iraqi victories, not actually to produce them. It is less easy to understand why so many in the Western media should have clung to their own delusions with a tenacity worthy of Mr. al-Sahhaf.

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Through the Bush administration's successes and failures, and even through its spectacular victory in Iraq, Maureen Dowd wavers not a jot from her firm conviction that her country's leaders are bumbling incompetents and moral pygmies with a fratboy mentality.

For someone who has made her reputation on the basis of wit and independent thought to cling so fiercely to her own prejudices about the Bush administration no matter what they do, she must run the risk of appearing as much the party hack as her *New York Times* op-ed page colleagues Paul Krugman, Frank Rich, Tom Friedman, and Bob Herbert. Perhaps some such transformation from lively mind to provider of the DNC's daily talking points is an occupational hazard of appearing on that page. In particular, Miss Dowd's hatred of those she calls the "Bushies" has always seemed to me like Rush Limbaugh's hatred of the Clintonites: an emotion so powerful that it all but wipes out the sense of humor.

In her column of April 9, for example, she began by hinting (much of her most negative commentary is made by innuendo) that the Bush administration rather enjoyed killing Iraqis, and then she dismisses their achievement at the moment that their victory became clear. "We were always going to win the war with Iraq," she writes, although only ten days before she had been lamenting "the incoherence of the battle plan" and hinting of comparisons to Vietnam. "The big question about the war," she went on, was this: "How much blood could Americans bear?" This was because "Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney were determined to lead America out of its post-Vietnam, post-Mogadishu queasiness with force and casualties, to change the culture to accept war as a more natural part of a superpower's role in the world. Their strategy might be described as Black Hawk Up."

Really? How does she know this? What is the evidence for this "strategy"? The nearest she comes to telling us is her contention that "Mr. Cheney's war guru, Victor Davis Hanson, writes in his book *An Autumn of War* that war can be good, and that sometimes nations are better off using devastation than suasion. Mr. Hanson cites Sherman's march through Georgia, the nineteenth century's great instance of shock and awe, as a positive role model." Never mind that this is unlikely to be a characterization of his views with which Mr. Hanson would agree, let alone an idea that Messrs. Cheney or Rumsfeld would endorse. As so often with Miss Dowd of late, the shocking—indeed, scandalous—nature of this charge, that key members of the Bush administration had led the country into war not for the reasons stated but in order to toughen up the American people for future wars, was scarcely noticed, so routine has it become for her to make such charges.

The week before she had portrayed the war as an Oedipal struggle between the President and his father and predecessor. But no one expected her to produce any clinical evidence of such a contention. Most likely, even people who agree with her broad views on the administration know that she doesn't mean it. She has become a mere humorist. Similarly,

> Wolfowitz of Arabia and the other administration hawks are thrilled with U.S. hawkishness. When Mr. Wolfowitz was on "Meet the Press" on Sunday his aides sat in the green room watching the monitor and high-fiving their boss's performance. As American forces made their first armored thrusts into Baghdad, visions of a JDAM strike on Damascus danced in the hawks' heads.

Really? And how does she know that? Oh, right. She *doesn't* know that. She's merely fantasizing on the basis of her ideological predispositions again, just like poor Mr. al-Sahhaf. Sometimes the old habit of reading her as if she were a serious person reasserts itself, but then we bump up against her scolding the moral cretins of the administration for supposing, as she pretends they do, that Americans' tolerance for these

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casualties should not be mistaken for a willingness to absorb endless American sacrifice on endless battlefields. "Victory in Iraq will be a truly historic event, but it will be exceedingly weird and dangerous if this administration turns America into Sparta."

Sparta? Is it possible that her loathing for Bush is so powerful that she has persuaded herself he *wishes* to turn America into some version of the ancient Greek garrison state, let alone that there is even the remotest possibility that he could do so if he did wish it? I don't think so. I think she is just writing in the "outrageous" style she has made her own since assuming that perch on the op ed page. It is her job, as she sees it, to conjure up out of speculation and verbal ingenuity a whole range of discreditable and, indeed, scandalous motivations for the behavior of those in power. And, like Mr. al-Sahhaf, she can appeal to a widespread opinion that she is just doing her job.

By the time that Baghdad fell and those diverting news conferences were finally taken off the air, al-Sahhaf had become a laughingstock, but that also made him a sort of postmodern hero. I thought it not necessarily with tongue in cheek that Dale Leibach of Prism Public Affairs in Washington ("a man with an antic sense of humor") was quoted in *The Washington Post* as saying that al-Sahhaf "has taken our profession, such as it is, to a level that is as inexplicable as it is humbling. I would hire him in a nanosecond." As Boris Johnson wrote in *The Daily Telegraph*, al-Sahhaf "has become a cult figure over the past few days; and if he isn't snapped up to host a game show, he has certainly shown that he understands the basic rules of modern political news management. These are, alas, that you must never concede defeat, whether it may be intellectual or military. Keep pumping out your message. Stay confident. Because such is the power of television that someone out there will believe you. Watching all over the Arab world—and, indeed in the non-Arab world—there must have been people who thought that al-Sahhaf might perhaps be exaggerating, but there must be something in what he said."

Even those who did not believe him must have had a sneaking admiration for the boldness with which he asserted what the BBC or CNN could only hint at, namely that reality itself was a creature of his will. An amusing website at welovetheiraqiinformationminister.com was devoted entirely to his increasingly bizarre denials of the most obvious facts. On behalf of his site, one Jean-Pierre McGarrigle wrote that "In an age of spin, al-Sahhaf offers feeling and authenticity. His message is consistent—unshakeable, in fact, no matter the evidence—but he commands daily attention by his on-the-spot, invective-rich variations on the theme. His lunatic counterfactual art is more appealing than the banal awfulness of the Reliable Sources. He is a Method actor in a production that will close in a couple of days. He stands superior to truth."

Peter Arnett to the contrary notwithstanding, it is this standing superior to truth rather than truth itself which is the journalist's—and especially the TV journalist's—dream. And their right so to stand was really the basis of the position taken up by Sambrook and other apologists for the BBC. "What is truth?" they ask, like Pilate, as their excuse for crediting falsehood. It was also what lay behind Mr. Jordan's assumption that the purity of his newsman's conscience was the only justification required for concealing what he knew of Saddam Hussein's atrocities. Anyone outside the journalistic culture could have told him that, whatever else CNN might have reported from Baghdad before April 9th, it was not reporting the truth.

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Fiction chronicle

A safe preserve for sport

by Max Watman

It was something, I guessed, in the primal plan, something like a complex figure in a Persian carpet.
—Henry James, "The Figure in the Carpet"

The search for an enigma catalyzes the revelations of character in "The Figure in the Carpet." Too often, writers learn not from James but from his character Vereker. They learn not the use of a macguffin to expose character flaws but, rather, that fiction might have a pattern. Likewise, revelation and discovery are key to the novel. The forced manifestation of an imposed pattern is merely boring and academic. Patterns can be put to work, however. Suki Kim's pattern of Korean immigrants—her delivery truck drivers, pool hall sharks, vegetable stand owners, and over-achieving second-generation kids—creates a fresh New York, one of which we've not read much and that, in our daily lives, we take for granted. *The Interpreter*[1] is Kim's first novel. In it, Suzy Park has dropped out of Barnard for an affair with a professor, now over, and has been disowned by her family. She is not good at keeping jobs; she works now interpreting Korean for lawyers in court and at depositions. When we meet her, she is early for an appointment. She has overdressed in Manhattan cashmere for a deposition in the Bronx. She is getting a cup of coffee from a McDonald's.

> Time is plenty here. People sit around in all corners. No one dashes out to a merger meeting at the head office. No one screams double espresso with a touch of skim milk. No one fumbles with a tray balancing a Motorola on their right ear. None of that happens here. This is a place of leisure. She's in no rush.

McDonald's, a place of leisure? Where's the diatribe on the cruel lighting? Where's the hysteria about the processed food? This is a fresh way of looking at things, and Kim carries it through.

Suzy Park is a depressed girl. She is so terrified of commitment that she refuses even to work regular hours. She lives alone in an apartment furnished mainly by an ex-roommate's things. Her lover is distant, married, older. Her parents are dead. Her sister won't speak to her. For all this, and though we do dwell a bit on Suzy's sadness, Kim does not wallow in her character's depression. There are enough novels out there that take place in a landscape that is all interior. Suzy moves, and what gets her moving is a mystery. Someone is calling Suzy and hanging up. On the anniversary of her parents' death—they were shot in their grocery store—she receives bouquets of irises, which were her mom's favorite.

Suzy's clue comes during a deposition. Suzy is not exactly straight with her lawyers. She knows, for instance, that it is "the Korean way always to underplay the situation, to declare one is fine even when suffer-

1 *The Interpreter*, by Suki Kim; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 304 pages, $24.

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ing from pain or ravenous hunger." So an injured man might say at the scene that he is fine. Now, seeking restitution, he will say simply that he is not a liar. Suzy will translate that he was "in shock, and the pain was not obvious to me until I got home and collapsed." She takes this a step further while conducting an interview with a man who knew her parents. The assistant district attorney asks if the man has a written contract with his employees, but Suzy asks who was responsible for the death of her parents. The man answers her question, murkily. Suzy turns to the ADA and answers that no, there were no written contracts. It is an outstanding scene. Kim writes a three-way dialogue in two languages, all at cross-purposes, with humor and clarity. So easily could this have devolved into an Abbot and Costello routine of misunderstanding. There is no such confusion; Suzy holds it together. We come to appreciate this underlying power, the spine of this woman. She is sad, and often mistaken, but solid and sympathetic. She learns that her parents were not the victims of some random gunman. They were shot once, through the heart, in the style of the Korean Killers, a murderous gang.

It comes out that the cops have new information. It also appears that her parents have no immigration record. The screw turns and the story moves. Throughout, Kim writes the city well. She is comfortable in the low rent housing, where the elevators smell like urine, and in downtown Manhattan, where the apartments are small. Her roommate tells her he is a philosopher and a performance artist. It turns out he's not. His father told him that only performance artists and philosophers were homosexual. Most admirably, Kim avoids identity politics entirely. She is not interested in ghettoizing her protagonist. Suzy is a character first, a representation of human psychology, one that Kim has studied too carefully to label simply as Korean, or Depressed.

Don DeLillo studies a lot, too. His attentions, however, rarely turn to the world. He is content to study himself. With *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo has drifted off into irrelevance.[2] How could he not? The undercurrents of fear and scheming that were the mainstays of his books have come true. That which was his—ideas about conspirators menacing the American systems upon which we rely—is now everyone's. Writing in *Harper's* after September 11, 2001, DeLillo did not entirely aestheticize. He wrote with compassion, but could not quite restrain himself, and there were, throughout that piece, spots of self-congratulatory wallowing:

> The World Trade towers were not only an emblem of advanced technology but a justification, in a sense, for technology's irresistible will to realize in solid form whatever becomes theoretically allowable. Once defined, every limit must be reached. The tactful sheathing of the towers was intended to reduce the direct threat of such straight-edge enormity, a giantism that eased over the years into something a little more familiar and comfortable, even dependable in a way.

He is betraying himself. He feels for people, I think, but his language here divulges his enthusiasm. He is pouring words on. He loves this. Of course, the words he pours are almost nonsensical—"technology's irresistible will," a "justification . . . [realizing] . . . whatever"—and they betray a thought process more intent on proving than exploring. "Tactful sheathing" seems to me to have nothing to do with reality and everything to do with DeLillo's desire to slip a condom over the towers.

He's been telling us for years that we would fail. We are fools depending on the familiar, the comfortable, and our systems. DeLillo has made a career of inventing peril and recasting our world in fear. DeLillo has now only his self-indulgence and his daydreams. Perhaps catastrophe did not bring him there; perhaps he was on his way already.

In *Cosmopolis*, it is April 2000, and billionaire twenty-seven-year-old Eric Packer leaves his absurd apartment—two elevators,

2 *Cosmopolis*, by Don DeLillo; Scribner, 224 pages, $25.

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each at a different speed, a shark tank—and gets in his absurd limousine—Carrera marble floors, cork-lined walls (just like Proust's), arrays of monitors, spy cams—for a drive across town to that most obvious symbol of innocence lost, the childhood barber, the location of that first tearful excursion into manhood. The city is New York, but only by name. DeLillo could have plucked his New York from the pages of a *Let's Go!* Consider this:

> Buses rumbled up the avenue in pairs, hacking and panting, buses abreast or single file, sending people to the sidewalk in sprints, live prey, nothing new, and that's where construction workers were eating lunch, seated against bank walls, legs stretched, rusty boots, appraising eyes, all trained on the streaming people, the march-past, checking looks and pace and style, women in brisk skirts, half running, sandaled women wearing headsets, women in floppy shorts, tourists, others high and slick with fingernails from vampire movies, long fanged and frescoed, and the workers were alert for freakishness of any kind, people whose hair or clothing or manner of stride mock what the workers do, forty stories up, or schmucks with cell phones, who rankled them in general.

For all its attempted singularity of detail, it fails to move beyond the mundane. I've read more specific tellings of the surging, scrambling city in ad copy. You can feel DeLillo pushing, reaching for that fingernail stuff, those "rusty boots" (Does he mean dusty? Leather doesn't rust.) but it fails. In the full flower of cliché, the crosstown traffic inches. Eric takes meetings in the limousine. The characters throughout are thin, barely human, poorly sketched vessels for DeLillo's needs. Eric meets with his young turk, a caricature of a dot-com kid with glasses and color in his hair. He meets with his theorist, an ostensibly smart woman who claims to be confused by financial information that any investment club housekeeper would own.

Eric has bodyguards, and there has been a "credible threat" on his life. That someone would want to kill this character may be the sole instance of plausibility throughout these pages. Throughout, Eric muses, or rather, DeLillo muses via Eric, on the obsolescence of things and the words for things. "He wanted to understand why cash registers were not confined to display cases in a museum of cash registers in Philadelphia or Zurich." I assume this kind of stuff—"Why phones?"—is meant to show that Eric is a true *Red Herring/Fast Company* type: the new man. That new man is no longer news, and everyone knows they all went broke. The riffs on the money game that Eric is playing, a bet on the Yen that he will lose which will cost him everything, read like the outdated, disconnected silliness they are. "All this optimism, all this booming and soaring. . . . I love information. This is our sweetness and light." The trick of the book, the daydream from which the thing must have unraveled, is that Eric, under constant video surveillance, is seeing things on the screens around him before they happen. He sees himself blink, and realizes that he could not see himself close his eyes, because his eyes would be closed. Ultimately, he sees his own death. He walks into the lair of the man intending to kill him, and claims he has done so because he "couldn't figure out the Yen." He argues half-heartedly to save his life, and ends waiting for his death. Whether critics will one day look back on our fiction and compare its blunt symbolism and heavy thematics to morality plays is hard to say. It does astonish, though, how utterly lacking in subtlety, how numbingly obvious certain novelists make their themes. I cannot imagine reading my favorite novels—*Huckleberry Finn*, for example—if they had been written now, any more than I can imagine a contemporary writer who could write a thing that communicated so broadly.

It is, however, easy to find a writer who tries.

Throughout his career, Richard Powers has bravely taken on the job of writing

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about people other than himself, and for that he deserves commendation. His latest novel, *The Time of Our Singing*, concerns a family founded by a black woman named Delia Daley and a German Jew named David Strom who meet at Marian Anderson's concert on the Mall in Washington, D.C.[3] They fall in love. "A bird and a fish can fall in love, but where will they build their nest?" is a Yiddish folk saying repeated throughout.

The family is a musical one; they steep their children in song. The two boys, one very light-skinned and named Jonah, the other slightly darker and named Joseph (they are called, together, as one name by their mother: JoJo) go on to musical careers. The daughter, named Ruth, becomes an activist, first a Black Panther, and then an educator and community organizer in Oakland, California.

The book is not so much about these people as it is about the ideas behind them or intrinsic to them. Powers is concerned not with people—odd, a novelist without a feeling for people—but with abstractions. He focuses on the idea of a family of mixed race, the idea of music, and the idea of time. David Strom, physicist and Columbia professor, studies time. Race, music, and time will be our themes, and we will not forget them for one moment.

Before I discuss the problems of theme, however, perhaps I should touch on two issues that are more pedestrian.

There are only two moments of humor in the book. The first comes when Powers, describing the sixties, writes: "Our hatless boy president plays touch football on the White House lawn. The continent is awash in spies, beatniks, and major appliances." Here's the other: "She's one of those opera personalities who must dress down when she's not onstage." That's it. There is another little bit that you will *think* is funny when you read it, but you'll realize, eventually, how far from funny it was intended to be. "Today is Easter, the day Christians say death died. To date, Strom has seen little evidence supporting the theory. Death, he feels reasonably confident, is poised to make an impressive comeback." Get it: "comeback"?

The majority of the dialogue sounds the same. This becomes obvious when Powers marches someone on who does sound different. Old Jewish people who speak like Jackie Mason show up every once in a while. When Joseph Strom looks for a bakery called Frisch's up by the Cloisters, an old Jewish lady directs him. ("She could have been my aunt. The fact would have killed her on the spot.") "*Mandelbrot!*" she says, "Frisch's, you don't need."

On Easter in 1939, Marian Anderson sang at the Mall in Washington, and Powers writes that the memory will "forever replay this day in black and white." For Powers, the black and white of the book is all. There is none of the subtlety of true race interplay and exchange. There is only the pounding of lines, the maintenance of coldly delineated division. The world is much more complicated than this. Powers defends himself, often having some character say that the only folks above race are white people. This, too, is an oversimplification.

David and Delia attempt to raise their children above race, or aside from it, in a world of art. This homeschooling comes crashing down around them. Art fails to protect the children, just as science fails to protect the father.

When Delia dies tragically, David Strom continues to speak with her, and he continues to look into the nature of time. He is working for little loopholes, little pieces of the stuff that makes science fiction writers so happy. One thinks of Stephen Hawking's pop-science question about why can we remember the past, but not the future.

The boys hide in their own ways, too. Jonah sings like someone right out of an Ayn Rand novel. He wins every contest and is always soaring off to some unimaginable height. The criticism written of him most frequently: perhaps he is too perfect. He

3 *The Time of Our Singing*, by Richard Powers; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 640 pages, $28.

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wraps himself up in music, moves to Europe, and, it seems, spends far too little time worrying about his family or how black he is. Jonah will die in the riots after the trial of the men who beat up Rodney King, a victim of the very issues outside of which he tried to live. Joseph moves to Atlantic City, where he wastes his genius plunking out baroque-jazz versions of popular songs in a bar. While there, he has a love affair, and that relationship is the best written piece here. The two folks falling in love is wonderful. They fall out of love, of course, and that is much less convincing. I know that Powers needs them to, but I never really get why they concur.

Of the children, Ruth is really on to something. She has this black power thing going on that ultimately fulfills everyone.

Alas, activism cannot fulfill their dead parents. Or can it? Back at the Mall for the million man march, Joseph gets separated from his little nephew (another super genius prodigy). The nephew is found by a German Jew and a black woman. Could it be? For David and Delia, too, found a little black boy on Easter so long ago. Powers melts the scenes together, and in this dreamstate, time bent all around to give us hope, he ends the book. "Written music is like nothing in the world—an index of time." I wish that Powers had thought about how graceful an index it is. Even the most ham-fisted, three-chord blues has more grace than this marching.

Some big-town Bolsheviks are visiting some small-town Bolsheviks, with whom they are discussing the local membership and the decline of Party revenue. There is a knock at the door.

> "Yes?"
>
> "Thesis!" came the reply, crisply pronounced.
>
> The old man turned to the gentleman from abroad for approval. Bobkin yelled out the countersign: "Antithesis!"
>
> From the other side of the door came a reflexive counter-countersign: "Synthesis!"

Ken Kalfus's first novel, *The Commisariat of Enlightenment*,[4] opens in Astapo, where great minds, great shapers of the future, have gathered in the Russian countryside for the death of Tolstoy. Ironically, the Count has become an object of worship, an icon. His fans adulate him; the nation awaits his death. Journalists have set up camp. Cinematographers are making newsreels. A scientist has taken the train to Astapo with an embalmed rat in his valise. Stalin is there, too. He meets a young employee of Pathé Frères named Gribshin, and says, "The camera does not lie. . . . The lens has no motives, no class background, no secret interests. It's a piece of glass. It has no *mechanism* for lying."

Stalin, of course, means exactly the opposite, as Gribshin is well aware. His newsreel, his first role as director, shows Tolstoy's spurned wife walk into the station house where Tolstoy is on his deathbed; the screen then fades to black. At the fade-in she is seen exiting the station house. The implication is that the Count reconciled with his wife before his death. They did not. Nothing happened while the screen was dark, she simply turned around and walked back out, but the implication of the fade-out is that time passed.

Although the action takes place decades before National Geographic used a piece of software to manipulate a bitmap image and moved one of the Pyramids for a better cover shot, the manipulation of facts is already in the cards. Both Gribshin and Stalin understand the power of information. We see Stalin hatch a plot for control of the telephones: "these private call boxes, when taken together, are like a kind of animal that moves with the relative collective will of its users . . . the only way to harness this beast is through the physical control of the exchanges." To control the spread of information is to control history, which is therefore to control how history is made.

This, by itself, is little more than a grad-

4 *The Commisariat of Enlightenment*, by Ken Kalfus; Ecco, 304 pages, $24.95.

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uate thesis on Marshall McLuhan. Luckily, this is not Kalfus's only thread.

There is, after all, the man with the rat in his valise. His name is Vorobev. He, too, has invented a means by which to control the future. Decay horrifies him. Embalming, however, excites him. His techniques are the result of long research and great enthusiasm. He likes his bodies fresh, as little decomposed as possible. "What greater monument to a great man's life than the man himself?" he asks.

The collision of the ideas of Gribshin and Vorobev is as inevitable as the counter-countersign "synthesis." Before they collide, however, Kalfus takes us through Russia just after the revolution.

Gribshin changes his name to Astapov; he was reborn in that little town. He works for the Commissariat of Enlightenment. He witnesses what might be the birth of cinematic pornography, when a female coworker receives carte blanche for films to educate women. "The first step toward emancipation is knowing how to gratify yourself." Astapov tells her that the film is indecent. She answers: "Indecency is a bourgeois concept."

Gribshin attempts to convert a village of peasants by exposing their Byzantine gold-encrusted images of saints to high-powered theatrical lighting with which he hopes to remove mystery. "Light! None of us should fear the light. . . . Light is the purest substance known to mankind. Light is a cleansing spirit. Light is truth. With electric light, Soviet power reveals the truth of science against the falsehoods of superstition." His show has the opposite effect, his offence only strengthens the peasant's loyalty to their saints and their relics.

He makes a newsreel that places Stalin at the seizure of the Kremlin in October of 1917, though it had happened in November, and Stalin had been at Petrograd. To achieve this, he stages a frightening riot and inserts a man who will subliminally suggest the presence of Stalin into the scene ("A mustache is too obvious. Get me the cap.").

Finally, Stalin asks him to hatch the most serious, most amazing plan of all. They must find a way to keep Lenin, who is dying, at the head of the Soviet. He must be preserved.

Astapov searches out Vorobev, the man with the rat in his valise. Vorobev understands: "Illich's so-called life no longer serves him or, for that matter, the world proletariat. These measures are taken on behalf of the Illich who will survive the cessation of his biological functions."

The end of Kalfus's terrific novel takes place inside the tomb, an internal narrative of Lenin's floating consciousness. "Vorobev's potion is really something," it turns out. Lenin doesn't even seem to resent the way they slipped it into his veins while he still breathed.

The dialectic is a three-chord riff, as are the aforementioned blues. Do them right, and three chords can feel ever fresh, but nothing will drag like the bungled blues. The same is true of writing. If you handle your subject well, no one will remember the other, more competent, renditions. If you handle your subject badly, you will remind your reader of all who have done better. That's the trick: you've got to come along with something so subtly novel, so right, that no one even thinks about all of the other times they've seen a family of WASPs crumble, a young Jew overcome his oppressive family, or someone find happiness in the desperate flatlands. Jessica Shattuck, in her debut novel, *The Hazards of Good Breeding*,[5] writes with profound dullness and lack of innovation. She writes as if she took notes for this novel at the movies. *The Hazards of Good Breeding* concerns the Dunlaps, a family of New England WASPs. The mother has been in a loony bin, the father is distant and powerful (although he occasionally tries to do something sweet and fails), the young son is quirky, the daughter is ashamed of being just home from Harvard. "Harvard?" she says. I swear, you keep thinking they are

5 *The Hazards of Good Breeding*, by Jessica Shattuck; Norton, 288 pages, $23.95.

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going to go to a party and someone is going to put a hand on the daughter's shoulder and haughtily tell her "Plastics." The parents are divorced and the daughter is suffering ennui. She just doesn't know what to do with her life! It doesn't stop there: the cast is full. The Frenchman, a romantic; the best friend, a stoner; the new wife of the best friend's dad, a sex bomb who "recently gave up her partnership at a prestigious entertainment law firm in Los Angeles to become an advocate for welfare mothers and domestic workers." Both! Welfare mothers *and* domestic workers! You can almost hear Shattuck saying, "You know, brown people." The only reason you cannot hear her is that her television is on too loud. Shattuck knows her characters are boring. She writes that Caroline, our leading lady, the daughter of the Dunlaps,

> grew up with [boys] who are in their mid-twenties now, well launched into inevitable futures of gradual hair loss, back problems, and knee surgery; of cool, polite marriages to blond girls whose health and athletic prowess had everyone fooled, for a brief window of time, into calling them pretty; of desperate, distraction-seeking love affairs with golf, paddle tennis, squash, and backgammon; of memberships to the Ponkatawset Club, and coat-and-tie thirtieth birthday parties; of having the same conversations with the same people in the same mind-numbingly dull places forever.

Tell me about it.

Into this mix arrives a filmmaker out to make a documentary about preppy culture. That's just in case you hadn't noticed you were reading a documentary about preppy culture, I guess. Ostensibly, he's on to something big. The big thing: Daddy knocked up the housekeeper. He tried to do the right thing. He fired her and gave her three months' pay. "He is responsible, after all, for the environment his son grow [*sic*] up in."

If I may, as an aside: does anyone edit these things anymore? Are we just pouring straight from the word processor to the press assuming that spell checker got it all? Why must I read of a character "downing" a Manhattan early in one scene, and later in the same scene have him drunk on vodka tonics?

When the housekeeper comes back to the Dunlap house after having her baby, Shattuck shifts to her point of view. She is empowered, she is going to leave her baby with the Dunlaps and go back to her home country. She lost her son there, he was kidnapped, and she wants to use the money she has saved to bribe people. The novel ends with her walking away "breathing deeply of everything she is leaving."

Each section of America has a story to tell. This book is not a story; even the quirky son stealing a horse isn't a story. Every section of society has its rise and fall, its industrious generation, intelligent generation, and profligate generation. I do not doubt that there are more good books about WASP culture out there waiting to be written, but this is not one of them.

It is wrong to assume that writers know anything. The best of them know some grammar, but ask any editor (if there are any left) and he'll tell you that they don't know even as much of that as they think they do. What writers have is a willingness to look for patterns in life and to try to figure out what people are doing. The patterns should reveal not the ticks and foibles of the writer, but should act as a lens into human nature. Someone once said that writers spend a lot of time thinking about things that other people take for granted. Obviously, this can go either way.

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Books

Remembering the Gulag

by Hilton Kramer

The first account of the concentration camps that I can remember reading was an essay by Hannah Arendt in the July 1948 number of *Partisan Review* when I was a sophomore in college. What I now mainly recall about my first reading of this essay, "The Concentration Camps," is that I was greatly put off by it. Expecting, somewhat fearfully, to be given a gruesome account of life (and death) in the camps, what I encountered instead was a succession of apodictic abstractions and pronouncements that seemed, to my undergraduate mind, unduly eager to place the whole subject beyond the reader's ability to comprehend it. Innocent as I then was about the details of the camps, this approach nonetheless struck me as an odd way to deal with a human catastrophe on an epic scale.

Rereading that essay today, more than half a century later, I can easily see what had put me off. This is a representative passage:

> The horror of the concentration and extermination camps can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death. The inmates are more effectively cut off from the world of the living than if they were dead, because terror compels oblivion among those who know or love them. . . . The fear of the absolute Evil which permits of no escape knows that this is the end of dialectical evolutions and developments. It knows that modern politics revolves around a question which, strictly speaking, should never enter into politics, the question of all or nothing: of all, that is, a human society rich with infinite possibilities; or exactly nothing, that is, the end of mankind.

Exactly what it could mean for any human experience to stand "outside of life and death" was never explained. Nor was Hannah Arendt's own response to early accounts of the camps ever in danger of succumbing to "the end of dialectical evolutions and developments." On the contrary, in her case it marked the beginning of an illustrious career as a connoisseur of the totalitarian "dialectical evolutions and developments" that led to the camps.

Two other aspects of "The Concentration Camps" essay are also worth noting. One is Arendt's bizarre insistence on downgrading the importance of eyewitness accounts of the camps.

> If it is true that the concentration camps are the most consequential institution of totalitarian rule, "dwelling on horrors" would seem to be indispensable for the understanding of totalitarianism. But recollection can no more do this than can the uncommunicative eye-witness report. In both these genres there is an inherent tendency to run away from the experience; instinctively or rationally, both types of writer are so much aware of the terrible abyss that separates the world of the living from that of the living dead, that they cannot supply anything more than a series of

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> remembered occurrences that must seem just as incredible to those who relate them as to their audience.

There was ample reason to doubt that any of this was true even before the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in the 1970s, but with respect to the Soviet camps, anyway, the claim of an alleged "tendency to run away from the experience" is scarcely credible in the light of the abundant first-hand testimony to the contrary. The author of *The Gulag Archipelago* was himself, after all, a zek, as inmates of the Soviet camps were called, and he was also an assiduous compiler of other zeks' personal accounts of their servitude and suffering.

What was true, however, was that the West wasn't especially eager to hear about the Soviet camps, and that for a long time the Soviets were remarkably successful in preventing the circulation of information about them. Even the word "Gulag" does not appear to have made its entry into our English-language dictionaries prior to the early 1970s, almost two decades after the death of Stalin and half a century after the creation of the Gulag itself. It can no longer surprise us, then, to find that another curious thing about Hannah Arendt's 1948 "Concentration Camps" essay is that it paid only the most cursory attention to the Soviet camps even though they had been in existence far longer than their Nazi counterparts—since, indeed, the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in 1917—and commanded vastly greater resources, populations, and territories.

What has to be understood, of course, is that the horrors of the Soviet system had never penetrated the public imagination in this country on anything like the scale that made the Nazis a familiar symbol of evil and criminality. Even as kids Americans of my generation recognized the swastika as an emblem of the "bad guys," if only from the movies we saw and the comic books we read. No Soviet symbol ever acquired a comparable status in the public mind. Nor did Hollywood make any movies about heroic anti-Soviet resistance movements. As Anne Applebaum writes in the introduction to her magisterial study of the Soviet camps—*Gulag: A History*,[1] a book that is certain to remain the definitive account of its subject for many years to come—

> The Cold War produced James Bond and thrillers, and cartoon Russians of the sort who appear in Rambo films, but nothing as ambitious as *Schindler's List* or *Sophie's Choice*. Steven Spielberg, probably Hollywood's leading director (like it or not) has chosen to make films about Japanese concentration camps (*Empire of the Sun*) and Nazi concentration camps, but not about Stalinist concentration camps. The latter haven't caught Hollywood's imagination in the same way.

Besides, Russia (as most people still called the Soviet Union) had been an ally in the war against Hitler, and was thus identified in the public mind as somehow belonging to "our" side. In the mainstream media and entertainment industries, the Soviet Union remained exempt from critical scrutiny, and the Gulag did not exist. Yet, as Ms. Applebaum also writes:

> [N]ot all of our attitudes to the Soviet past are linked to political ideology. . . . Many, in fact, are rather a fading by-product of our memories of the Second World War. We have, at present, a firm conviction that the Second World War was a wholly just war, and few want that conviction shaken. We remember D-Day, the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, the children welcoming American GIs with cheers on the streets. No one wants to be told that there was another, darker side to the Allied victory, or that the camps of Stalin, our ally, expanded just as the camps of Hitler, our enemy, were liberated. To admit that by sending thousands of Russians to their deaths by forcibly repatriating them after the war, or by consigning millions of people to Soviet rule at Yalta, the Western Allies might have helped

1 *Gulag: A History*, by Anne Applebaum; Doubleday, 677 pages, $35.

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> others commit crimes against humanity would undermine the moral clarity of our memories of that era. No one wants to think that we defeated one mass murderer with the help of another. No one wants to remember how well that mass murderer got on with Western statesmen. "I have a real liking for Stalin," the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, told a friend, "he has never broken his word." There are many, many photographs of Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt all together, all smiling.

This is why *The Gulag Archipelago* and Solzhenitsyn himself met with such resistance and hostility in this country after his expulsion from the Soviet Union. "Soviet propaganda was not without its effect," writes Ms. Applebaum. "Soviet attempts to cast doubt upon Solzhenitsyn's writing, for example, to paint him as a madman or an anti-Semite or a drunk, had some impact." Let us never forget the infamous passage in George Steiner's *New Yorker* review of *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1974: "To infer that the Soviet terror is as hideous as Hitlerism is not only a brutal simplification but a moral indecency." Nor was Steiner alone in his hostile response to Solzhenitsyn's revelations. The late Irving Howe, who had found so much to admire in Leon Trotsky, took to the pages of *The New Republic* to offer Solzhenitsyn moral instruction on the correct way to think about socialism.

Has anything really changed in our public comprehension—or incomprehension—of the Gulag since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the final dismantling of the Soviet camps? We shall all be in a better position to answer this question when we see what kind of critical reception is accorded to Ms. Applebaum's extraordinary account of the Soviet camps. Or, what is even more important, what impact that reception may have beyond the sphere of the book-review pages of our newspapers and magazines—in the realm of media opinion and public awareness. For make no mistake: *Gulag: A History* is a landmark achievement in the writing of modern history. Until some work of a comparable size is devoted to the millions who have perished under Communist rule in China, this book will remain a model for what is, in effect, a new historical genre: the history, that is, of what may rightly be called an anti-civilization on a colossal scale whose sole claim to distinction has been the degradation and destruction of millions of innocents. In the anti-civilization of the Soviet Gulag in the years 1929 to the death of Stalin in 1953, it encompasses some eighteen million people, four and a half million of whom never returned.

Gulag: A History is not, then, to be mistaken for a comprehensive history of the Soviet Union; it is rather a history of Soviet society's most distinctive institution, described by Ms. Applebaum as

> the vast network of labor camps that were once scattered across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, from the islands of the White Sea to the shores of the Black Sea, from the Arctic Circle to the plains of central Asia, from Murmansk to Vorkuta to Kazakhstan, from central Moscow to the Leningrad suburbs. Literally, the word GULAG is an acronym, meaning *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, or Main Camp Administration. Over time, the word "Gulag" has also come to signify not only the administration of the concentration camps but also the system of Soviet slave labor itself, in all its forms and varieties: labor camps, punishment camps, criminal and political camps, women's camps, children's camps, transit camps. Even more broadly, "Gulag" has come to mean the Soviet repressive system itself, the set of procedures that prisoners once called the "meat-grinder": the arrests, the interrogations, the transport in unheated cattle cars, the forced labor, the destruction of families, the years spent in exile, the early and unnecessary deaths.

It is Ms. Applebaum's distinctive accomplishment to have traced the tortuous history of this anti-civilization in scrupulously documented detail from its Bolshevik beginnings to the Great Terror, the Second

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World War, the early years of the Cold War, the death of Stalin, the Thaw that followed, the era of the Soviet dissidents, and the final collapse of the Soviet regime. And while *Gulag: A History* is written throughout in a prose that is exemplary for its clarity, its gravity, and its moral candor, it must also be acknowledged that the book is a long and difficult read—difficult, above all, because of the feeling of outrage and despair it induces in the reader. I could not myself get through the chapter devoted to "Women and Children" without pausing to wipe the tears from my eyes more than once. And that is by no means the only section of the book to induce such a response.

For Ms. Applebaum lavishes a great deal of attention on what may be called the social and domestic history of the Gulag—the food that was provided the inmates, the bedding, the hygiene (if it could still be called by that name), the sexual customs and even the romantic attachments that developed in the camps. Worst of all, perhaps, are the accounts of the inhuman work schedules demanded by what she nicely describes as the Camp-Industrial Complex in the Soviet workers' paradise. It is an immense achievement to have written this book. What now remains to be seen is whether our own society, which for so many decades has refused to acknowledge the moral enormity of the Gulag, is even now equal to the challenge of giving this achievement its due.

The apple in our eye

Patricia Fara
Newton: The Making of Genius.
Columbia University Press,
347 pages, $27.95

reviewed by John Derbyshire

I picked up this book thinking it was a biography of Newton. Thus disposed, I picked it up with some reluctance—and then, only after two or three weeks of procrastination. That Sir Isaac Newton was a tremendous genius, there is no doubt at all. There are excellent arguments for the proposition that, so far as mathematics and its physical applications are concerned, Newton's mind was the most powerful that ever existed. The story of Newton's life, however, is, to put it very mildly indeed, not enthralling. He never traveled outside eastern England. He took no part in business, or in war. In spite of having lived through some of the greatest events in English constitutional history, he seems to have had no interest in public affairs. His brief tenure as a Member of Parliament for Cambridge University made not a ripple on the political scene. Newton had no intimate connections with other human beings. On his own testimony, which there is no strong reason to doubt, he died a virgin. He was similarly indifferent to friendship, and published only with reluctance, and then often anonymously, for fear that: "[P]ublic esteem, were I able to acquire and maintain it . . . would perhaps increase my acquaintance, the thing which I chiefly study to decline." His relationships with his peers, when not tepidly absent-minded, were dominated by petty squabbles, which he conducted with an irritated punctiliousness that never quite rose to the level of an interesting vehemence. "A cold fish," as the English say.

I was only able to stir myself to pick up Patricia Fara's book at all in the slim hope that it might be a "mathematical biography"—which is to say, much more math than biography. (Compare: "musical biography.") Newton's math has never had the attention it deserved from biographers. His work on cubic equations, for example, is one of the distant ancestors of modern algebraic number theory, whose achievements include Andrew Wiles's 1994 proof of Fermat's last theorem. It would be nice to see a math-leaning biography—I don't think there has been one.

In fact I quickly found, with some relief, that Ms. Fara has written not a biography at all, but an altogether different kind of book. Instead of an account of Sir Isaac's life, Ms.

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Fara has written an account of his reputation. How, her book asks, did this man become an icon of scientific genius? Given his accomplishments, it was inevitable that now, 276 years after his death, Newton should be a famous figure, but what path did his fame take? How did it fare under the various cultural changes of the last three centuries? How was it seen outside his own country? Who were its opponents, and who its inheritors? Where are its shrines? What are its associated myths?

This gives the author a very rich deposit of material to mine. I am surprised she managed to hold herself to such a modest length. There is a host of colorful characters here, some familiar (though usually not in this context), some quite unknown. Among the former, we early on meet Caroline of Anspach, George II's queen, for whom Newton was a convenient peg on which to hang her aspirations to be both a bluestocking and an English patriot. Caroline had a grotto built in the royal gardens, containing stone busts of her five intellectual heroes: Newton, Locke, Boyle, the metaphysician Samuel Clarke, and the theologian William Wollaston. The two last are now, of course, utterly forgotten. (And Boyle had pride of place in Caroline's display. It is understandable, but regrettable, that the author did not include the one exchange for which this lady is remembered by her countrymen. On her deathbed she expressed the wish that her husband should remarry. The heartbroken George replied: "*Non—j'aurai—des—maîtresses*." Sighed the expiring queen: "*Cela n'empèche pas*.") Of the unknowns, I think my favorite was George Cheyne, a medical reformer who tried to apply principles of Newtonian attraction to medicine, in a weird construction known as "iatro-mathematics." Cheyne struggled heroically, but mostly unsuccessfully, with problems of diet and alcohol intake, eventually becoming so fat that "a servant had to follow him with a stool so that he could recuperate every few yards."

"Iatro-mathematics" illustrates an important aspect of Newton's influence. The fame of Newton's theories was so great, even among people who barely understood them, that Newtonian, or "Newtonian," concepts leaked out into other areas of inquiry and activity. In Newton's own time this meant mostly matters of theology and cosmology, from which seventeenth-century political science proceeded. This casts new light on the famous Newton-Leibnitz quarrel, which went much deeper than competing claims to have invented the differential calculus.

> According to Newton, God had created independent, individual particles that, as they traveled through empty space, constantly interacted with each other and formed new associations. In contrast, Leibnitz maintained that God had established a harmonious universe completely filled by inherently active entities called monads. Although they operated independently, and no longer needed God's direct control, Leibnitz's monads had been in a sense pre-programmed so that they worked together to fulfil His plans.

These different cosmologies were then used as supporting arguments for the different political arrangements of England and Germany, with the numerous petty states of Leibnitz's Germany in the role of self-sufficient monads. The great political innovation of Newton's time, constitutional monarchy, was by contrast seen as an image of God's power to intervene in the affairs of the universe, a power whose exercise, in a well-regulated system, should hardly ever be required. In the course of the eighteenth century these notions fed into the swelling stream of English (and then—I genuflect here to the historian Linda Colley—British) self-regard. By the end of that century, Britons had it firmly fixed in their minds that they were paragons of practical common sense, possessed of a system of government founded on copper-bottomed empirical principles. In a chapter headed "Icons," Ms. Fara describes the mass marketing of engravings featuring elaborate allegorical images of famous Britons, in-

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cluding Newton, Locke, and the Duke of Marlborough. Locke seems to have been especially linked with Newton—he was there in Queen Caroline's grotto, recall—and this is entirely fitting, given that he himself confessed a philosophical debt to the younger man.

Large currents of thought were influenced not only by Newton's ideas but also by the idea of Newton. Was he born a genius, or had he been trained up to it? By the middle years of the nineteenth century what we nowadays call the "nature-nurture" debate was well under way, and was just as loaded with political prejudices as it is in our own time. Lecturing at the London Mechanics' Institute, the reforming journalist Thomas Hodgskin, who was an influence on Karl Marx, argued that Newton was little more than a product of his time, able to gather up the researches of others and form them into a synthesis. (A notion in fair agreement with Newton's own self-deprecating remarks about "standing on the shoulders of giants." I think, however, that Newton's remarks should be taken principally as *pro forma* assertions of gentlemanly modesty. His actual estimate of his own powers was probably somewhat higher.) Contrariwise, stern Tories like Carlyle cleaved to the idea of Newton as an innate genius, a "gifted spirit," of a type no mere social improvement could bring forth.

This is, in fact, one of those books—Paul Johnson's *Birth of the Modern* is another—that sets you to thinking about the deep currents of thought that prevail in any given age, across fields as distant from each other as mathematics, music, philosophy, political science, architecture, and theology. The twentieth century can be seen in these terms, with relativistic concepts beginning in mathematical physics, then spreading out to the human sciences, and thence to the popular imagination. So with the great revolution brought about two hundred years earlier by Newton's physics. We have so thoroughly internalized Newtonian ideas that it is hard for us now to see how striking they were when new, and how tempting to a wide range of thinkers.

Including satirists: Voltaire's mistress Emilie du Châtelet, a keen Newtonian, was lampooned by Francesco Algarotti in his *Newtonianism for the Ladies*, uttering such absurdities as: "After eight Days' absence, Love becomes sixty-four times less than it was the first Day, and according to this Progression it must soon be entirely obliterated." Voltaire was, as I think is well known, a quite fanatical Newtonian. He published one of the earliest accounts in French of Newton's ideas, with a frontispiece representing du Châtelet as the Goddess of Truth. (Voltaire believed, probably correctly, that his lover had a better grasp of mathematics and science than he had.) Ms. Fara gives over a whole chapter to the French reception of Newton. In the decades prior to the French Revolution, Newtonianism played into the general *Anglo-manie* current in French intellectual circles, as well as the obsessions with Reason and Vision, and with all else that scandalized the stuffy Throne-and-Altar conservatism of the *ancien régime*. Newton was actually a subversive figure in 1740s France—Diderot put him into a pornographic novel. France had an intellectual totem of her own in Descartes, and Newton had at first been set on a level with him. Political and religious factions soon pulled the two philosophers apart, however. The Jesuits in particular favored Descartes for his affirmation of the existence of the soul, and denounced Newton as a materialist and atheist. This would have been startling to Newton (dead at this point—his dates were 1642 to 1727), who was intensely religious, though in a narrow and peculiar way. The Jesuits, however, controlled a large part of the educational system of Catholic Europe, and their point of view was correspondingly influential and long-lasting. French wits chuckled over the story of a Cartesian beating a Newtonian in a fist-fight. Lacking any repulsive force, the Newtonian fell to the ground when the Cartesian's fist was attracted to his center, instead of being de-

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flected in a circle as Descartes's concept of "vortices" required.

Newton: The Making of Genius gives off a slight whiff of po-mo oppressionism, and I suspect Ms. Fara of feminist sympathies, though for the most part she keeps them decently under control. Here we are, for example, with an exchange between Newton and the astronomer Edmond Halley. Newton, struggling with the *Principia*, had likened philosophy to "an impertinently litigious lady." If this was so, replied Halley, it was a lady "whose favors you have so much reason to boast of." This is too much for Ms. Fara, who lets fly with a blast at "the gendered foundations of academic science, in which knowledge is pursued by celibate males unveiling the secrets of female nature." Possibly so: but surely this is a little hard on Sir Isaac, considering how little actual ladies had to fear from his attentions. It is difficult to see how Newton can be squared with the radical feminist dogma that "all men are rapists" without stretching metaphors far beyond breaking point.

These slight and occasional deformations aside, this is an excellent survey, from all angles, of Newton's reputation. The book is nicely produced, with a good index, plentiful notes, and a vast bibliography. Factual errors are few: the Academicians in *Gulliver's Travels* were making sunbeams out of cucumbers, not vice versa, . . . but I spotted nothing more consequential than that. The argument is seasoned with a pleasant sprinkling of curious little facts. Did you know that at the time of his death—he was eighty-four—Newton had lost only one tooth? That the tree from which the celebrated apple fell was made into a chair? That John Maynard Keynes was a keen collector of Newton's alchemical manuscripts? That British partisans of Newton vented their patriotic pride in Newtonian drinking songs?

> The atoms of [Des]Cartes Sir Isaac destroyed;
> Leibnitz pilfered our countryman's fluxions;
> Newton found out attraction, and prov'd
> nature's void
> Spite of prejudic'd Plenum's constructions.
> Gravitation can boast,
> In the form of my toast,
> More power than all of them knew, Sir.

Are Cambridge undergraduates toasting confusion to the Queen's enemies with songs about Stephen Hawking? I doubt it. One can't help feeling that some of the fun has gone out of science.

Dark comedy

David Kovacs, editor Euripides.
Vol. 5: Helen, Phoenician Women, Orestes. 605 pages, $21.50.
Vol. 6: The Bacchae, Iphigenia at Aulis, Rhesus. 480 pages, $21.50.
Loeb Classical Library/
Harvard University Press

reviewed by Donald Lyons

What Thucydides says about the total tergiversation of the Greek ethos in the course of the Peloponnesian War remains the best introduction to the late, bleak, crazy plays of Euripides:

> Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man, and to plot against an enemy behind his back was perfectly legitimate self-defense. Anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect. To plot successfully was a sign of intelligence, but it was still cleverer to see that a plot was hatching. . . . Revenge was more important than self-preservation. . . . Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils. To this must be added the violent fanaticism which came into play once the struggle had broken out. . . . [T]here was a general deterioration of character through the Greek world. The simple way of looking at things, which is so much the mark of a noble nature, was regarded as a ridiculous quality and soon ceased to exist.

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David Kovacs has done a splendid job editing all six volumes of the new Loeb Euripides. The final two volumes contain *Helen*, *Phoenician Women*, and *Orestes* (volume 5); *The Bacchae*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Rhesus* (volume 6). Kovacs has provided for each play a crisp introduction, a learned text, a clear translation, and a useful bibliography. All his volumes have a spacious, airy feel. In this, as in much else, they differ from Arthur S. Way's cramped four volumes (1904), which were full of locutions like "Thou hast done—what? Thou thrillest me with fear" and breathed the chipper spirit of Edwardian certainty. Neverthless, although Kovacs has given us the best text, the best translations—lively, bold, and spirited—continue to be in the Chicago version, especially those of William Arrowsmith, which include those late masterworks, *Orestes* (408 B.C.) and *The Bacchae* (407)—plays that I will look at here after a brief survey.

In his early years the facile young dramatist used myth to investigate the psyches of women; he called them Alcestis, Medea, and Phaedra. Such plays were to earn Euripides the comic scrutiny of Aristophanes—a mockery that could not hide a likeness, a fondness for extreme situations that both men shared. The comic writer Cratinus noticed this in his coinage, *euripidaristophanizein*, to write in the style of both men.

Around 412, toward the end of both his career and the war, came two plays—*Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Helen*—that consciously sought to offer an alternate, a differing, a happy version of the most familiar Greek stories. (The *Ion* of 414 is similarly euphoric.) Iphigenia, secreted off in Eurasia, and Helen, hidden down in Africa, offer Orestes and Menelaus, respectively, joyful rescue from a nasty world. It is difficult not to see in these plays the vocabulary of tragedy used as a dreamlike, fantasy escape from what was now an increasingly somber world.

The *Orestes* has not been appreciated for what it is. It amounts to nothing less than a thorough and lawless rewriting of Athens' great founding play, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458), particularly the last member of the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, which presented the suffering and redemption of Orestes, the Apollo-driven killer of his killer mother. Out of Orestes's trial, presided over by Athena, came the founding legal institutions of Athenian civilization and the peaceful domestication of the previously hostile Eumenides. Intelligence and goodwill reign.

In Euripides' wartime revision, Electra is tending her delirious brother Orestes after the matricide. Orestes sleeps. "And why repeat the old charges against Apollo?" mutters the young woman sarcastically. "The world knows all too well how he pushed Orestes to murder the mother who gave him birth, the act of matricide which wins, it seems, something less than approval in men's eyes." Menelaus, whose wife Helen and daughter Hermione are hiding in the palace, will be the solution to all problems when he arrives. A half-crazed Orestes awakes and begs Menelaus for help against the people, who are about to order his death by stoning. Menelaus dithers. Orestes' bosom pal Pylades suggests: "We'll murder Helen. That will touch Menelaus where it hurts." But, when they try to grab Helen, she escapes by flying through the roof to heaven, as reported by an excitedly incoherent Phrygian slave. Orestes decides to murder, if not the wife, at least the daughter of Menelaus on the grounds that "I can never have my fill of killing whores." Menelaus is very upset. He and Orestes insult each other first in stichomythia (the exchange of whole single lines) and then in antilabe (the exchange of parts of lines). Apollo suddenly pops by on the machine and glibly solves the quarrel, pairing off unlikely types.

What is amazing about this play is the way it ingeniously uses the vocabulary of mythology to display the collapse of the same world that mythology supported and explained. Euripides was a very clever writer—a genius, if you will—who painted

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feckless people adrift in a savage society—and painted them often with a dark, strangely modern comedy.

According to tradition, Euripides wrote *The Bacchae* in wild Macedon after leaving a doomed Athens in 408, a few years before the disastrous end of the Peloponnesian War. (Kovacs buys this colorful story.) It was produced posthumously in Athens by a son or nephew. In it the dialectic between a god's fierce power and any human's silly impotence is taken to a point where a pious mother tears apart an impious son, thinking him a young, delicate calf she caught in a Dionysiac orgy. There are passages of rapt beauty: "The upper air was still, the leaves of the wooded glade kept silence, and no sound of beast could be heard." There is also humor, of the ridiculing kind: "Your girdle is slack," Dionysus tells Pentheus, as the god dresses up the king as a woman for his mountain foray.

The Bacchae strikes me as neither defaming nor exalting religion. Rather it sees the world as empty of meaning but not of energy. It is a bitter but amused old man's play, crammed with stratagems but endorsing none. The artist he most reminds me of is Buñuel.

From little acorns

A. C. Grayling Life, Sex, and Ideas: The Good Life Without God. Oxford University Press, 256 pages, $27.50

reviewed by John Simon

First off, despite the title and the famous Man Ray nude on the cover, there is little about sex here; titillation seekers will have to look elsewhere. A. C. Grayling is a professor of philosophy, formerly at Oxford and now at the University of London. He contributes to high-toned journals on both sides of the Atlantic, has published several books, and writes a weekly column, "The Last Word," for *The Guardian*. Combining literary journalism with the teaching of philosophy bespeaks erudition, eclecticism, and a certain welcome eccentricity.

Life, Sex, and Ideas: The Good Life Without God is a collection of Grayling's columns, which run chiefly from two to four book pages, plus a few longer pieces from elsewhere. They are grouped into seven sections: "Moral Matters" (ranging from "Meat" to "Marriage"), "Public Culture," "Community and Society," "Anger and War" (encompassing "Safety" and "Slavery"), "Grief and Remembrance" (including "Suicide"), "Nature and Naturalness" (containing "Monsters," "Madness," and "Clones"), and "Reading and Thinking" (with pieces on "The Essay," "Biography," "Philosophy," and "Reality"). One might rashly assume that such small meditations on large topics may be fine in a newspaper, but meager fare between hard covers. True enough, required concision sometimes leaves us hungry for more. But Grayling makes a virtue of journalistic constraint: craving for more should stimulate the reader to further thought along the adumbrated lines—call it heuristics. Concentration here does not entail embarrassing lacunae, militate against clarity, or indulge in jesting Pilate tactics, deliberately failing to abide our question.

Grayling is a liberal: growing up colonial English in Central Africa, surrounded by subservient servants, "together with the realisation that Plato's politics are extremely disagreeable . . . gave my political views their permanent list to port." Yet this liberalism is anything but kneejerk, as behooves one who, at age twelve, came across Socrates in a well-stocked little African library, and proceeded to educate himself by reading—in those hot, isolated, televisionless days in Africa—some of the best books written from classical antiquity onward to his own day.

He is a nonbeliever and a scorner of all religion, which he compares to believing in fairies at the bottom of your garden, and perceives as one of the root causes of intolerance, persecution, and war. Although

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he may not summon up new arguments for his cause—are there any left?—he assembles the best existing ones, and presents them with originality, pungency, and compactness.

Take a typical passage:

> The causes of most conflicts involve large admixtures of mutual ignorance, the parent of suspicion and hostility. . . . Everyone knows these lessons of experience: stated, they seem painfully obvious. But experience also teaches how infrequently they are heeded. . . . Experience's greatest lesson, it would seem, is that the lessons of experience are too easily forgotten—or, which comes to the same, too late learned.

Each of these essays begins with an epigraph—always pertinent and often pert, culled from an amazingly wide range of sources—this piece, "Experience," having for motto a Chinese proverb, "Experience is a comb nature gives to the bald."

Apropos nature, here is a passage from "Nature":

> People use "natural" and "unnatural" as emotive terms expressing their preferences. What is considered natural and acceptable in some cultures is thought disgusting in others, and at certain times in history what is considered natural is for that reason despised—as at the end of the nineteenth century, when the rich ate white bread and sugar because whiteness denotes purity, with all the pleasant natural bits "refined" away, whereas now people eat brown bread and sugar because brown is the color of health and shows that the foodstuffs are closer to their natural origins. With such changes of fashion and use affecting it, the concept of naturalness is practically useless.

Or consider the following, from "Madness," with a superscription from Pascal, "Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would be another form of madness":

> In the collective form of insanity, whole populations . . . rise from sleep at about the same time each day, move in great herds to locations at some distance from their home territory, perform repetitive maneuvers there, return home when evening falls, slump in front of a flickering colored light, and after a while fall asleep again. They repeat the process day after day for decades. The disease is called "normal life," and variations from it are regarded as eccentric; if the variations are marked enough, they are even called "madness" and "delusion."

It should be stressed that Grayling is neither a fanatical naysayer nor a disheveled counterculturist, but a rationalist with feeling, a proponent of intelligent change, the need for which he scouts out diligently, but propagates with seemly self-control. About radical extremists, he writes: "One wonders if they are in the pay of those against whom the protest is directed . . . the only ones who benefit from what they do." He points out the absurdity of today's African-Americans seeking reparations for ancestral slavery. And he is not so pacifist as to ignore times "when bad people have to be stopped from doing something worse."

His erudition seems boundless, and is not confined to literature, history, and philosophy; he easefully encompasses science, sociology, economics, and politics as well, with wonderful quotations and citations at his fingertips. Without naming British sources, such as an educated Briton can be expected to command, and what with my interest in the humanities governing my choices, I list incompletely and at random Justice Hand, Anatole France, Aretino, Thomas Paine, Tertullian, Pompidou, Aijaz Ahmad, Tzvetan Todorov, Ovid, Seneca, Eliphas Levi, Robert Mapplethorpe, *Star Trek*, Adorno, Quentin Tarantino, the *Panchatantra*, Joseph Wood Krutch, Max Lerner, Gide, Ben Franklin, Aesop, Victor Hugo, Remy de Gourmont, Francis Steegmuller, Ambrose Bierce, La Rochefoucauld, Turgenev, Petrarch, Elbert Hubbard, Unamuno, Stanislaw Lec, Margaret Fuller, Wittgenstein, and on and on.

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In the section "Reading and Thinking," literature and philosophy mingle fruitfully, with great usefulness to readers and reviewers. Here you will find one of the fairest discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of Harold Bloom and a cogent appreciation of one of Grayling's favorites, Hazlitt, in the context of a tribute to the essay genre, which "began in English in the seventeenth century with Francis Bacon and—despite the hurry of contemporary journalism and the desiccation of academicism—still flourishes." And reading this book, we are ready to agree that "perhaps the closest thing to the 'familiar essay'—the intimate, informal essay random in topic and design—is the newspaper 'column,' where the columnist's personality and style are the main point."

One wishes that the OUP had not let slip such typos as Euripedes, vomitarium, Goring, Grand Armee, Bettleheim, and an occasional lapse in grammar and syntax. (An index, too, would have served.) Never mind; Grayling's admirable credo might be the Virgilian "parcere subiectis et debellare superbos," but the lowly to be spared only if deserving, the mighty attacked only when abusing their power. Would there were more such men of good sense.

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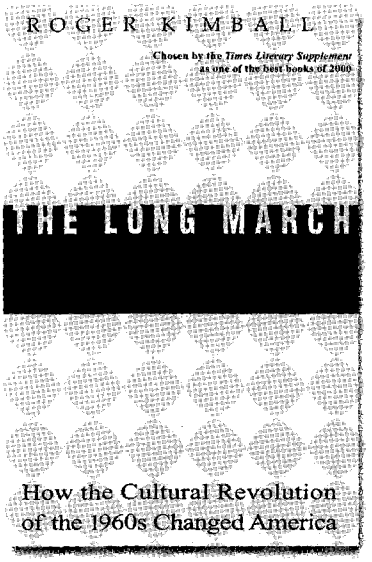
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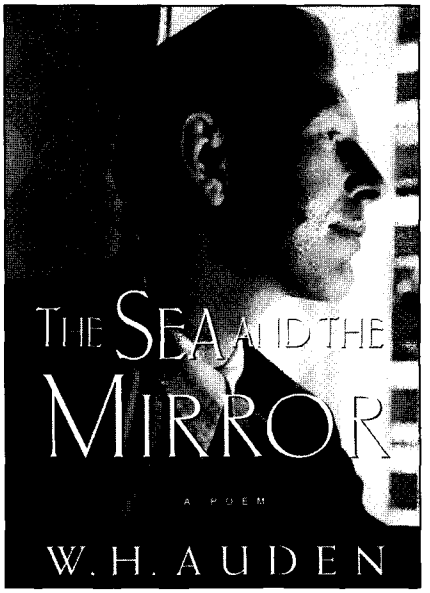

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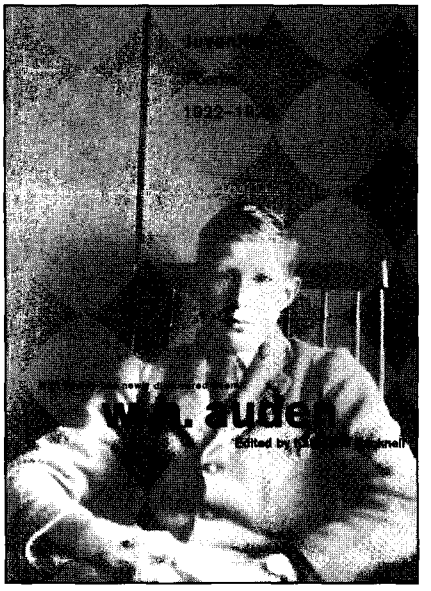

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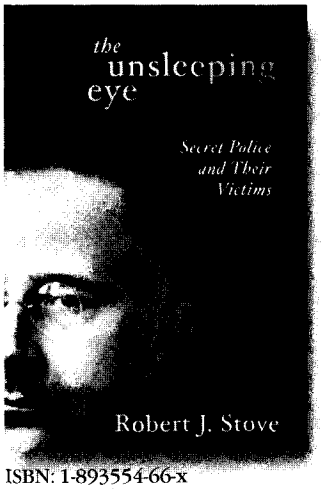

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Thursday, May 1: MELVIN EDWARDS *on his work* —
Sculptor, CDS Gallery

Tuesday, May 6: *Remarks on Sculpture and Performance*
ALAIN KIRILI — Sculptor and performance artist; Marlborough Gallery, NY

Wednesday, May 7: *Gainsborough's Paintings: A Kind of Magick*
MAGDA SALVESEN — Independent art historian and writer

Tuesday, May 13: MALCOLM MORLEY *on his work* —
Painter, Sperone Westwater, NY

Wednesday, May 14: *The Frick That Might Have Been*
SAMUEL SACHS — Director of the Frick Collection, NY; former Director of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts and The Detroit Institute of Arts; President of UNESCO's International Committee of Fine Arts

Tuesday, May 20: MIMI GROSS *on her work*—
Painter, sculptor, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries; set and costume designer for dance

Wednesday, May 21: GREECE: ART AND CULTURE II*:
ICON: Holy Image, Holy Space
DR. GARY VIKAN — Director of the Walters Art Museum; internationally known scholar of medieval art. At Walters he curated a number of significant exhibitions, including: *Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece*

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